

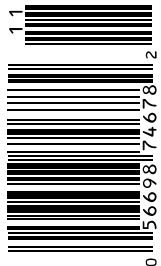
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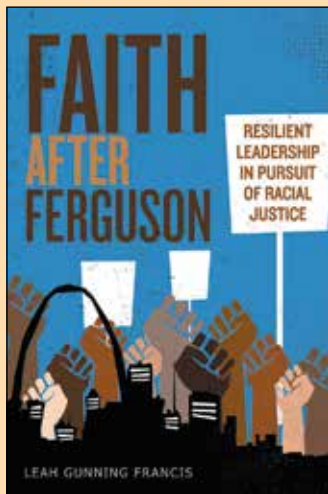


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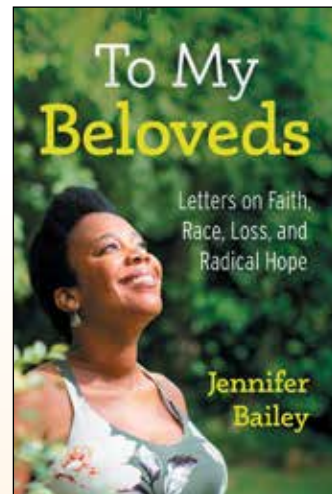


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by Leah Gunning Francis

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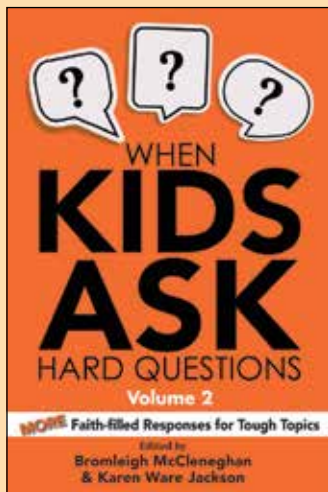


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by Jennifer Bailey

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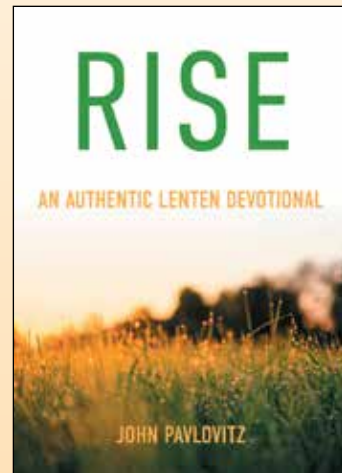


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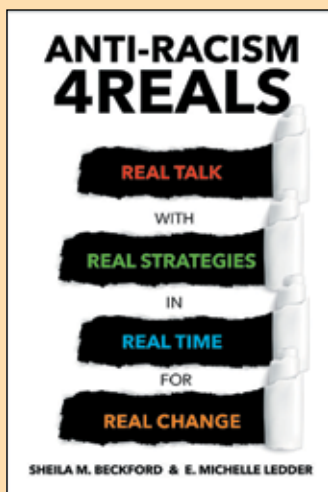


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Foreword by Gregory C. Ellison II

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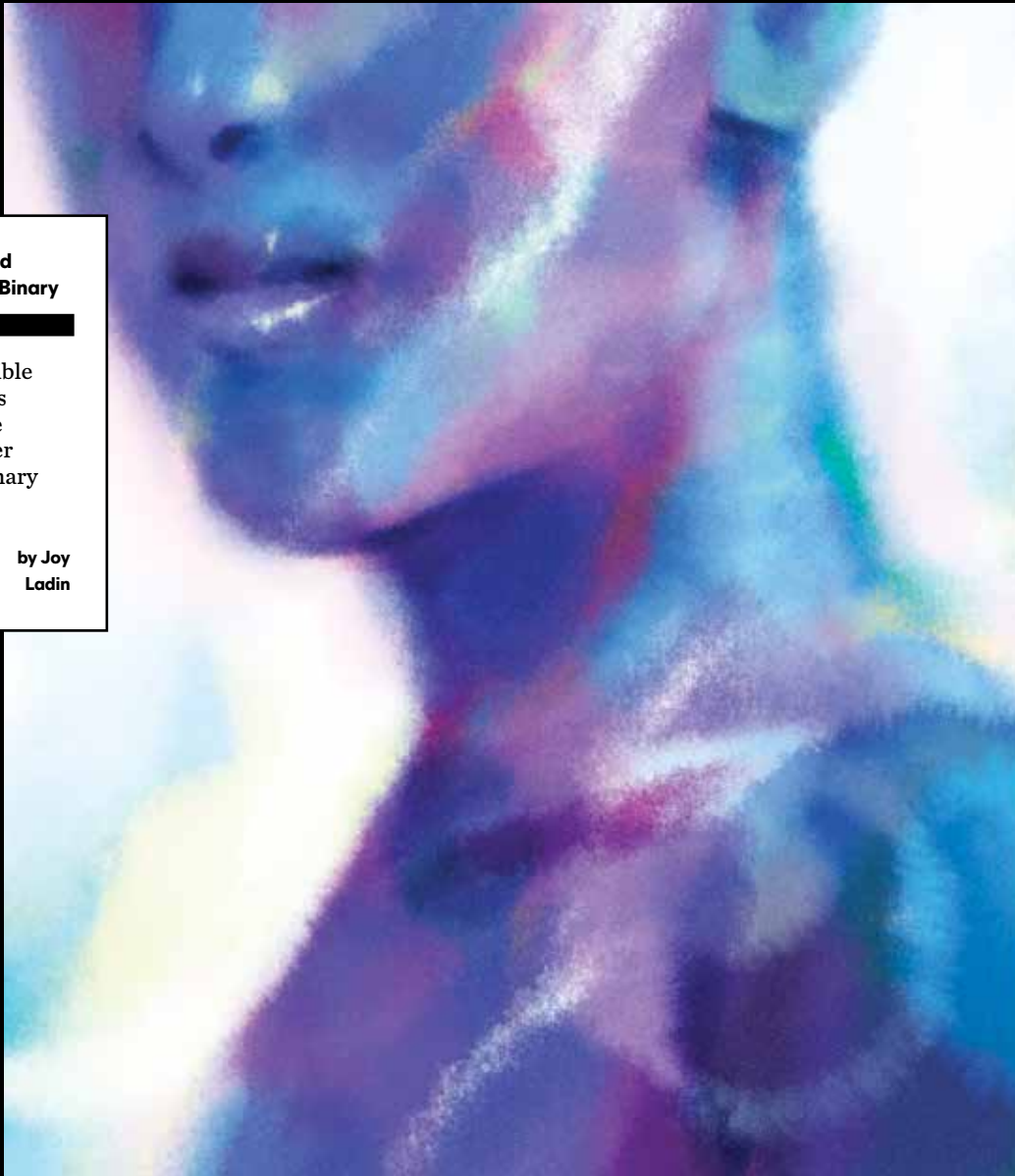
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How the Bible
prepares us
to embrace
transgender
and nonbinary
people.

by Joy
Ladin



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A Look Back *Sojourners* magazine was born 50 years ago this fall. A glimpse of the people who got it all started.

Photos by
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Ed Spivey Jr., and others

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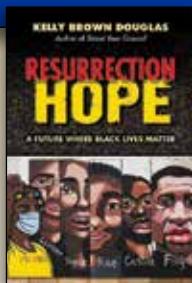
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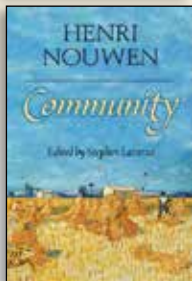


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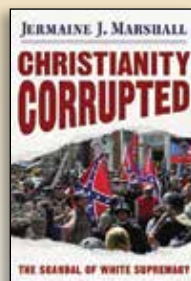
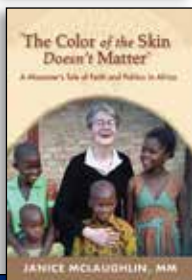
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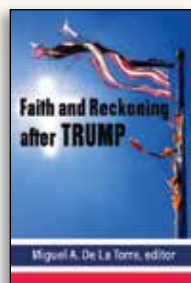
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SOJOURNERS

From the Editor

The first issue of what became *Sojourners* magazine, published 50 years ago this fall, addressed topics that are still very relevant in 2021. Volume 1, No. 1 brought a vibrant faith in Christ to a range of issues, from a theological reflection on Black Power ("Black Power functions as an ideological base of spiritual awareness for those Blacks who realize the spiritual dimension of their humanity, but who cannot identify or intimately associate with what they conceive to be a white, blue-eyed Jesus") to a biblical critique of enculturated liberalism ("The liberal believes that the tendency for progress is incorporated into the very nature of our institutions. Thus he or she is forced to believe that continual progress is being made, even while poverty, starvation, militarism, and racism are on the increase."), as well as essays on economics, politics, militarism, and what it means to follow Christ in a consumer society ("Fundamentally, we protest a society that stresses 'having' rather than 'being.'"). Some of our language has changed and our community has grown, but—a half-century on—our commitment to wrestling with these social, political, cultural, and theological matters remains steadfast. We're glad you're part of this journey with us!

RESPONSE

True Sacraments

In "Rewriting the Script" (Sept/Oct 2021), associate editor Christina Colón writes, "If the pandemic showed us anything, it's that people can worship from anywhere, in anything, with anything—even apple juice and Ritz crackers. Why then should the future church not be the same?" Leslie Ducharme  responded: "Each beloved community will look different ... and worship definitely has room to grow and change from what it was." Weighing in on the idea of a decentralized church, Jacob Froese wrote via email, "It's a good idea, but somewhat theologically limited. Church is more than a social service and fellowship network." Steven L. Heilmer  joked, "Apple juice and Ritz crackers!? Heresy! Every good Protestant knows the true sacraments consist of Welch's grape juice and Wonder Bread cubes."

Write us: response@sojo.net



"DO NOT BE DISCOUR- AGED. THE HOLY SPIRIT IS NOT ASLEEP."

Thomas Merton
in a letter to Daniel Berrigan

CONTRIBUTING



Liuan Huska

"I write so that people can see their place and purpose in the world more clearly," says Liuan Huska, *Sojourners'* new columnist (p. 16).

Weaving themes of chronic pain, ecology, and negotiated identities, Huska hopes to "articulate things brewing under the surface." She serves on the board of A Rocha USA, a Christian organization for biodiversity conservation, and lives on ancestral Potawatomi land near Chicago with her husband and three sons.



Joy Ladin

"People like me prove that identifying as transgender or nonbinary is not inherently secular or at odds with religious faith," writes author and teacher Joy Ladin (p. 28). Speaking of her experience navigating traditional religious communities and their expectations around gender, Ladin illuminates the category-defying God present in the Hebrew Bible and offers freedom from the "fear that basically boils down to people in each position saying, 'I can't be me if you are you.'"

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million**

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farmworkers in the U.S.

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trillion**

Amount agriculture and
related industries
contributed to the
U.S. GDP in 2019

35x

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die from heat exposure
compared to the
national average

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The mission of *Sojourners* magazine is to inspire hope and action by articulating the biblical call to racial and social justice, life and peace, and environmental stewardship.

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1

MOBILIZING HOPE

BY ADAM RUSSELL TAYLOR

FIVE DECADES OF 'CREATIVE MALADJUSTMENT'

A tree's longevity and fruitfulness are tied to the health and strength of its roots. I'm deeply grateful for the deep roots of Sojourners. For the past 50 years, Sojourners has provided a countercultural Christian witness for peace and justice. We have been rooted in a commitment to relentlessly making the case that faithful discipleship involves a transforming and redemptive relationship with Christ, which then empowers and enlists us to serve as change agents in the world to advance God's reign of peace, justice, and radical love.

As I look ahead with hopeful anticipation to the next 50 years, Maya Angelou's timeless wisdom comes to mind that "you can't really know where you are going unless you know where you have been." To understand where we have been and where we are going, we must tap into the full meaning behind our name.

AS WE LOOK AHEAD TO THE NEXT 50 YEARS, SOJOURNERS WILL FIND EVEN BOLDER WAYS TO SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER.

“I’M DEEPLY GRATEFUL FOR THE DEEP ROOTS OF SOJOURNERS.”

As we look ahead to the next 50 years, Sojourners will find even bolder ways to speak truth to power while also creating the space for transformational dialogue so we can learn how to disagree and find common ground. We will keep incorporating new wineskins as technology continues to transform our work and our activism. We will develop even stronger relationships and solidarity with the global church as we embrace our interdependence. We will emphasize the existential threat of climate change that will require shared sacrifice and greater urgency and activism to break our addiction to carbon. We will continue to be a counter voice against the dangerous tide of white Christian nationalism and white supremacy that threatens both the integrity of the church and our democracy. We will continue the work of convincing and equipping the church to see that advancing peace and justice is not an extracurricular activity but is integral to Christian discipleship. In fact, this may be the most powerful force in revitalizing the church’s mission and rehabilitating the reputation of the church, particularly among younger generations and those who have been bruised by the church. We will increasingly seek to strengthen the multi-generational and multiracial movement committed to building Beloved Community. ✕

To sojourn is to constantly be on a spiritual journey fixated on a kingdom-building purpose. At our best, sojourners are so filled with how things ought to be that the brokenness of what *is* gets replaced by the pregnant possibility of what’s to come.

Martin Luther King Jr. captures the ethos and charism of Sojourners in his sanctified remix of Romans 12, in which he proclaims that the “saving of our world from pending doom will come not through the complacent adjustment of a conforming majority but through the creative maladjustment of a nonconforming minority.” Sojourners’ 50-year history is full of examples of creative maladjustment and transformed nonconformism—from our founders’ early opposition to the Vietnam War, which led to them being pushed out of divinity school and starting *The Post-American* (the precursor to *Sojourners* magazine), to our prophetic actions to end the nuclear arms race and seek peace in Central America, our work in the anti-apartheid struggle, our efforts against the war in Iraq, our current battles against voter suppression, and so many more.



Adam Russell Taylor is president of Sojourners.



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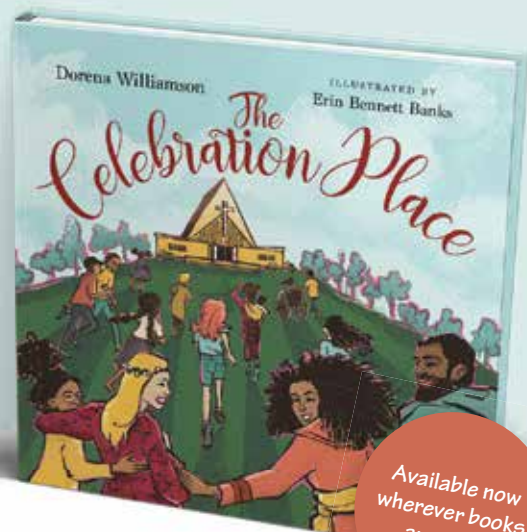
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Dorena Williamson has a passion for all children to hear the message of God's diverse kingdom. She writes children's books that adults also enjoy and is the author of *ColorFull*, *ThoughtFull*, and *GraceFull*. Dorena and her husband, Chris, cofounded Strong Tower Bible Church in Franklin, Tennessee, a multicultural fellowship passionate about biblical justice and God's diverse kingdom.



NONVIOLENCE IN AFGHANISTAN?

Nonviolent civic mobilizations can tap into potential for social change.



2

Afghanistan has been in conflict for more than 40 years. The former Soviet Union sent in more than 150,000 troops on Christmas Eve 1979 and left 20 years later. The U.S. began a massive bombing campaign in October 2001, the first stage of the war to oust the Taliban. Now, 20 years later, the U.S. has withdrawn the last American troops. It is hard to find a single Afghan, including myself, who hasn't been a victim of the ongoing conflict.

As Afghans know, parties in these battles change, but the outcomes—devastation and killings—remain the same. Ordinary Afghans, as we have seen with the recent Taliban resurgence, pay an immeasurable price. They are killed, bombed, displaced, and disabled. However, the voices of these ordinary people are rarely heard. Perhaps they no longer raise their voices. What speaks loudly is their pain and sorrow.

Despite numerous formulas and prescriptions for ending bloodshed and oppression in Afghanistan, violence remains. Most solutions were formulated by the elite class. They

are the ones in the driver's seat. They make decisions as they please. The wishes of ordinary Afghans are nowhere to be found.

Ordinary Afghans did not raise a critical voice during the U.S.-Taliban peace deal signed under the Trump administration in early 2020 that resulted in the withdrawal of U.S. forces. Rarely has the Afghan public stood up to the conflictual parties to forcefully put out the ferocious fire burning down their house. Ordinary Afghans appear to be hopeless about change. Violence is assumed to be the only currency for transformation.

Existing notions about power are a major cause for Afghan passivity. As long as ordinary Afghans believe that only violence, or the threat of violence, can change their situation, they will not be capable of developing the potential for positive change. In my experience, it is only through nonviolence that individuals learn their potential power for change.

Since 2011, I have trained more than 1,400 youth, activists, women, religious scholars, and tribal leaders throughout Afghanistan. Our teams have translated many training materials on nonviolence into local languages. I've translated three books on nonviolence into Pashto. These trainings have produced some remarkable responses—especially given the atmosphere of retaliation. The philosophy of these workshops is to empower the target groups for change.

Nonviolence has a rich history in the region, particularly the legacy of the Khudai Khidmatgar, a predominantly Pashtun nonviolent resistance movement against British colonial rule in the 1930s, under the inspiration of Abdul Ghaffar Khan. Nonviolent civic mobilizations have also been carried out during the current conflict, particularly the 2018 Helmand Peace March, in which thousands from around the country streamed into Kabul to protest war.

An extensive knowledge of nonviolent civic mobilization is the most effective way to change Afghans' attitude and behavior. Nonviolent civic mobilization taps into their potential for change. Not only that, but nonviolent civic mobilization empowers ordinary Afghans through peaceful tactics that can be utilized in more organized and disciplined campaigns aimed at changing the status quo.

NONVIOLENCE HAS A RICH HISTORY IN THE REGION.

Only when ordinary Afghans mobilize strategically and peacefully will they become part of the existing power equation. Only then can they pressure warring factions toward a peaceful solution. However, know-how on nonviolence is limited and needs to be contextualized for Afghanistan. This calls for training in nonviolence to precede mass mobilization. Education comes before mobilization. ❖

Ahmadullah Archiwal leads trainings in nonviolence through the Organization for Social, Cultural, Awareness, and Rehabilitation in Kabul. He has authored three books—two on the nonviolent movement Khudai Khidmatgar and one, in Pashto, on nonviolent civic mobilization.



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COMMENTARY

BY SANDY OVALLE MARTÍNEZ



LIFE ABUNDANT

Reconnecting with the people involved in the web of production is one way of moving toward life.

“Hay más tiempo que vida” was my dad’s refrain every time I was stressed and weary. “There is more time than life.” His simple words had profound implications.

Being present to life is difficult. Life demands that we “rise and grind.” Reward comes to those who make the most of the time they’ve been given. Time is money. Time is a commodity we trade. The promise of life is the goal of all this grinding—or retirement, if we are privileged.

During the pandemic, I’ve pushed against beliefs that commodify time. I’ve cooked the foods that nourished my ancestors: tamales verdes, atole de tamarindo, and nopalitos. My senses have been awakened through mixing the nixtamalized corn flour with water and fat until it reached the right texture, peeling and deseeding each tamarind pod, cutting the nopal (cactus) and cooking it with a few tomatillo husks to remove the slime.

The preparation of these foods forces me to notice the rough spots on the cacti where thorns still make their home, to smell the acid scent of tamarind in the pulp clinging to my fingers; it invites me to play with the unruly dough that believes its place is on top of the corn husk and not inside. If death shows up in separation, life sprouts in connection.

But on most mornings, I check my email as soon as I wake; on some nights, I work through to the early hours of the morning. This grind separates me from life. Is this the price we must pay for entrance into delight, rest, or relationships?

Jesus knows this dilemma and offers a way forward: “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). The life Jesus presents is abundant, flourishing, overflowing. He notices the widow bringing her two cents to the Temple treasury; his gaze is on the woman who had been bent over for 18 years; he feels the person who touched his garments. Jesus made space to be present, to notice.

The voracious hunger of the rich, the “thieves” who take more than they need, speaks death over our souls. Economic “efficiencies” in an industrialized production process too often serve to move money to the top while stealing the life out of life. It’s hard for us to know how even our food was produced. For example, the most accessible masa for tamales in the United States is made with genetically modified corn from the U.S. that is sold to a global company in Mexico (the birthplace of corn) for branding and processing in U.S.-based factories, then placed in local U.S. grocery stores and sold as a Mexican product. Too often we are blocked from the lives of those people and environments who give life to our food before it reaches us. We are separated from their stories.

Life longs to have a relationship with us. Reconnecting with the people involved in the web of production is one way of moving toward life. I say a simple prayer before dinner: *“Te pedimos por todos los que colaboraron en esta mesa que tengan trabajos y descansos justos, mesas abundantes y alegres.”* A reminder of those along the way that brought this food to our table. I ask that they have full and joyful tables, fair wages, and abundant rest.

My dad’s *sabiduría* (wisdom) offers me a prophetic invitation to something he did not experience. While reminding me to be present to my life, his life was one of intense labor—as if he was preparing the way for my rest, joy, and abundant life. *Hay más tiempo que vida.* ✱

Sandy Ovalle Martínez, a native of Mexico City, is director of campaigns and mobilizing at Sojourners.

M

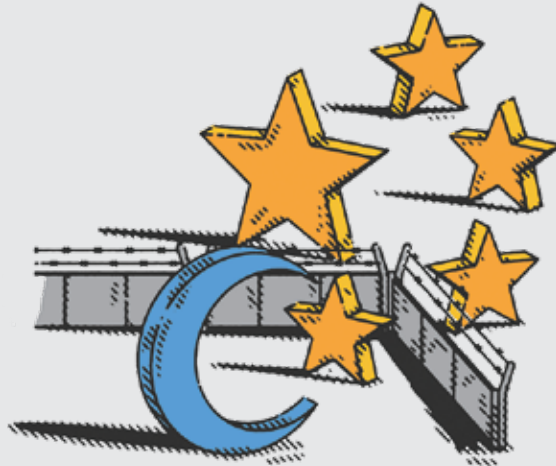
A MILLION MISSING FRIENDS

My journey with the Uyghur people began in 1985 when I accepted a teaching position at Xinjiang University in Urumqi, a regional capital on China's far western border. My wife and I made many friends during our seven years there. The Uyghur, an ethnic Turkic people of 12 million, are predominantly Muslim and live in the only Muslim-majority area in China, called the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (by China) or East Turkestan (by the Uyghur and Kazakh peoples).

In 2017, we were greatly distressed to hear credible reports that the Chinese government was interning citizens in (what the government calls) "reeducation" camps. As many as a million people have been detained in 300 to 400 facilities in Xinjiang province, according to the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, including "political education" camps (part of a 70-year program of forced cultural assimilation), pretrial detention centers, and prisons. Detainees are subjected to torture, cultural and political indoctrination, and forced labor. The U.S. Holocaust Museum says this state-sponsored violence meets the threshold for genocide and crimes against humanity. Friends and colleagues have disappeared.

In May, I met Uyghur poet, linguist, and human rights activist Abduweli Ayup on a Zoom call. Ayup spent 15 months in Chinese prisons for his defense of Uyghur linguistic culture. On our call, he told the terrible story of his failure to save from the camps his 30-year-old niece, Mihriay, who taught Uyghur children in the Chinese education system.

Early in 2019, two years into China's concentration camp era, Mihriay's parents told her they were in danger because of Ayup's activism. Mihriay asked her uncle,



"Do you want me to die? You are between two stones, and they are squeezing *me*," Ayup told her that he would not stop his activism. His niece responded by refusing to talk to him. Shortly after, her father Erkin—Ayup's brother—was "disappeared," rumored to be held in a concentration camp in Kashgar in the predominantly Uyghur area of southern Xinjiang.

In May 2019, Mihriay called her uncle from the plane. She was returning to Kashgar amid the genocide. While afraid for her, Ayup's advice was, "Don't betray yourself. Keep your dignity. Throw away your cell phone after you land." A year and a half later, Ayup received news that Mihriay had died in the same detention center where he had been incarcerated. Mihriay's arrest was part of a larger campaign by local government authorities against participants in a 2013 Uyghur linguistics conference, presumably for the promotion of Uyghur language education. Ayup estimates that 72 participants in the conference have been arrested by the Chinese authorities. He hopes that Mihriay's death will bring renewed attention to the hundreds of Uyghur intellectuals unjustly imprisoned by the Chinese government.

As activism has blossomed in streets across the United States to address unjust deaths, many of us are learning the biblical practice of lament, an anguished cry reaching up to God, and learning to enter the stories of our neighbors. Can we do the same for Mihriay and with our Uyghur and Kazakh neighbors in China? *

THE U.S. HOLOCAUST MUSEUM SAYS THIS STATE-SPONSORED VIOLENCE MEETS THE THRESHOLD FOR GENOCIDE AND CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY.

Bill Clark is Northwest regional director for Peace Catalyst International.

SACRED ATTACHMENT

3



"This world is not my home / I'm just passing through / My treasures are laid up / Somewhere beyond the blue." This old gospel song summed up my approach to the physical world as a young Christian.

Coming to faith in the Bible Belt of the United States, I confused admonitions to "not belong to the world" (John 15:19) and "walk not according to the flesh" (Romans 8:4) with a blanket statement to shun physicality. Later, when I discovered the contemplatives and monastics, their stories of fasting and asceticism seemed to reinforce the idea that detachment from the material world is the most holy path.

But in a time when some Bible-thumping Christians respond to deforestation and species extinction with a shrug and say, "It's all going to burn anyway," I reject these interpretations. "The world" and "the flesh" that Jesus and Paul had in mind are not the earth and our bodies. They are, rather, human-made social hierarchies and oppressive, extractive economies. Do not belong to these. But *do* belong to the gooseberries, the crickets, the soil, and the gurgling creeks.

In a conversation with environmental theologian Norman Wirzba in March, Yale professor (and Baptist minister) Willie Jennings distinguished

**OUR INTERPRETATIONS OF
SCRIPTURE HAVE TOO OFTEN BEEN
FORMED BY A COLONIAL MINDSET.**

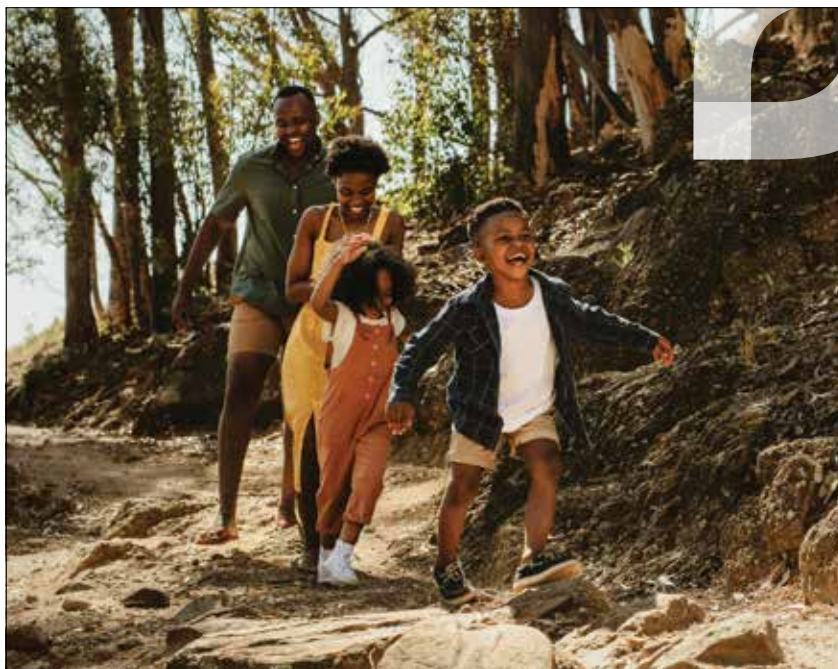
between the colonial mindset—possession *of* the land and our bodies—and the Indigenous mindset—possession *by* the land. The former requires detachment, which enables control. The latter requires attachment and vulnerability, which enable community and care. Our interpretations of scripture have too often been formed by a colonial mindset, which uses faulty religious teachings to justify abuse of other humans, animals, and the earth.

When I read news of heat waves and crop failures, forests burning, and swamps drained for development, grief wells up in my gut, drawing my limbs to walk outside. I dig my toes into the grass, feel the wind caress my skin, and reach out to touch the 150-year-old maple tree in our front yard. She is a new friend who has been here all along. I've only recently recognized her as elder and kin. "What do you know about enduring and resilience?" I ask her. Then I listen.

In earlier years I might have listened to the voices that say, "Remain detached. This doesn't matter. You're just passing through." But I'm finding a different way, a path of sacred attachment. I'm learning to respect what my body and the earth are saying. The arc of scripture, after all, ends not with us being swept up to heaven, but with heaven coming down to earth. God will dwell among us (Revelation 21:2-3). My friend the maple, and all those beloved forests, will be restored in all their glory.

For now, I'll keep on loving this holy, physical world. This is my home, where my treasure is laid up. This, too, is part of God's kingdom. ❖

Liuan Huska is author of *Hurting Yet Whole: Reconciling Body and Spirit in Chronic Pain and Illness*. She lives on ancestral Potawatomi land near Chicago.



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THE HUNGRY SPIRIT

BY ROSE MARIE BERGER

FALLING LIKE A LEAF, WITHOUT REGRET



A

A monk dies much as he lived—in holy obscurity. That’s the goal at least.

Father Maurice Flood lived as a Trappist for 64 years. At his funeral in August, his abbot described Maurice’s monastic journey as “atypical.” And so it was.

To enter the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance (Trappists), one vows silence, stability, poverty, chastity, continual conversion, and obedience to Christ (in the person of one’s abbot). When I met Maurice in 1980, he was uproariously funny and riding his Harley-Davidson around the U.S. with a homemade telescope strapped to the side. Though neither silent nor “stable,” his other vows appeared to hold firm.

In 1957, when he was 22, Maurice joined the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky. There was another “atypical” monk in residence at the time: Thomas Merton. Merton’s influence on Maurice was defining. For several years, it was Maurice’s job to tend Merton’s hermitage. As a discipleship practice, it embodied the Zen koan: “Before enlightenment: chop wood, carry water. After enlightenment: chop wood, carry water.” But their intimacy was shattered in 1968 with Merton’s sudden death in Asia. Maurice’s faith fractured then, too—his sense of self, his vocation. Monastery life became increasingly difficult; eventually, he was granted a leave from Gethsemani for a year of discernment. That’s when he acquired the Harley. He made his way west, camping, staying with friends

**“THE ONLY THING THAT WILL
REMAIN WILL BE ALLELUIA!”**

and Catholic Workers. He lived with my family in Sacramento for several weeks.

I was a senior in high school. From my room, I could hear Maurice keeping Vigils at 3:15 each morning. Psalms sung quietly in Gregorian plainchant drifted through the ductwork. For Thanksgiving, he made us perfect lemon meringue pies—but, to much hilarity, forgot the lemons. Cooking dinner was a glorious production, resulting in heaps of leftovers. “I’m used to cooking for 50,” he quipped, “not five.”

As with so many others Maurice befriended, we formed a lifelong bond. In 1983, he transferred to Holy Cross Abbey in Virginia—an unusual move. In 1991, I attended his ordination to the priesthood. When his brother monks filed forward to lay hands on their newest priest, I joined the parade. As I placed my palms on his grey stubble, he glanced up. A woman’s touch? Then his eyes twinkled conspiratorially, and he cracked the tiniest smile. Later Maurice served as chaplain to Our Lady of the Redwoods, a women’s monastery in northern California (where he again “chopped wood and carried water”). When his health failed, he returned to Holy Cross.

I watched Maurice’s funeral via live-stream from the smoke-filled Sacramento valley. A hundred miles east of me, conifers fat with sap, alongside houses and highways, exploded; a voracious blaze inhaled the fuel load desiccated by drought. To the west, C-17 cargo planes landed at nearby air bases with bellies full of Afghan families arriving from Kabul.

In the end, every monk wants to “fall without regret / like a leaf,” as Wendell Berry put it. Maurice did just that. His mortal remains are tucked in the earth—while his soul cracks jokes with the saints.

“At present, alleluia is for us a traveler’s song,” eulogized his abbot, “but by a toilsome road we are wending our way to home and rest where, with all our busy activities over and done with, the only thing that will remain will be alleluia!” Somewhere between disaster and paradise, one monk found his way. ✱

Rose Marie Berger, author of *Bending the Arch: Poems*, is a senior editor of *Sojourners* magazine.

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SOJOURNERS

EYEWITNESS

4

**"FARMWORKERS ARE
PUTTING THEIR LIVES
ON THE LINE TO PICK
FOOD FOR OUR
COMMUNITIES."**



THE FRONTLINE VICTIMS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

“Sebastian Francisco Perez was a 38-year-old farmworker working at a tree farm in Saint Paul, Ore. He had come here to gain some money for fertility treatments for his wife, because they really wanted to start a family. I guess people just weren’t aware of the signs of heat exhaustion and heat stroke. After some time, folks he was working alongside were like, ‘Hey, where’s Francisco?’ When they found him, he had passed away from the heat. When PCUN found out about that, we were outraged, because this was a very preventable death. We were openly advocating for the Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Division and the governor to issue emergency rules, because we knew something like this was going to happen. [After Perez’s death] we got these rules enacted. It’s important to have clean water, frequent breaks, and access to shaded areas, because when you’re in the field, there’s not really much cover.

Climate change is putting all our lives at risk, but [especially] people that are out [on farms], who can’t stop working, because that means that we no longer have access to food. Farmworkers are putting their lives on the line to pick food for our communities. Farmworkers feel like they can’t take a day off or they can’t take a break, or they can’t miss work—be it because they’re sick, or because there’s smoke that’s so bad that you can’t even see or breathe, or there’s heat that’s so bad that it’s impacting your well-being—because they need to be able to make that money to provide for their family.

According to the CDC, between 2004 and 2018 there was an annual average of 702 heat-related deaths in the U.S. Farmworkers are 35 times more likely to die of heat exhaustion than any other occupation in the country. And it’s projected that, by 2050, hot days due to climate change will double.” ✕

María Cecilia Hinojos Pressey is operations director for PCUN (Pineros Y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste), Oregon’s farmworker union. She spoke with Sojourners’ Jenna Barnett.





A Look Back

Sojourners magazine was born 50 years ago this fall.
A glimpse of the people who got it all started.

Photos by Dennis Fahringer, Ed Spivey Jr., and others.

We've been told we don't look a day over 39! Okay, old joke. But we're acutely aware of the slightly awkward irony of an intentionally countercultural—and counterinstitutional—movement, formed in the ragtag, “don't trust anyone over 30” culture of the early 1970s, turning 50 years old. Like the Rolling Stones, we're still hard at it, as we mark five decades since the beginnings of *Sojourners*. While we're more structured and stable than back in the early days of the so-called People's Christian Coalition (which, not surprisingly, published many raised fists in our first few issues), we're still doing our best to speak truth to power, afflict the comfortable, and all that. Our outward appearance may have evolved over the years, but our mission—our first principles—are unchanged from day one.

The photos on the next few pages focus on the people who launched *The Post-American* in 1971 and helped it to thrive and grow after our 1976 move to Washington, D.C., where it became *Sojourners* magazine. The publication was started by students at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Ill., north of Chicago—students who were convinced that much of the church, and the evangelical part of it in particular, was wrong in its support of the Vietnam War, wrong in its approach to racism and racial justice, and at best inadequate in its awareness that the gospel calls disciples of Jesus Christ to be agents of change in our fallen world.

As you'll see in these photos, community, worship, and public actions for social justice were all part of the job description for those who put out the magazine—there was little separation between magazine work and our socially engaged life together in Christian community. After 50 years, we're still strong believers in an integrated life of faith and social justice, and we try to tell that story in every issue of *Sojourners*. We hope you enjoy this look back at our earliest roots.

—The Editors



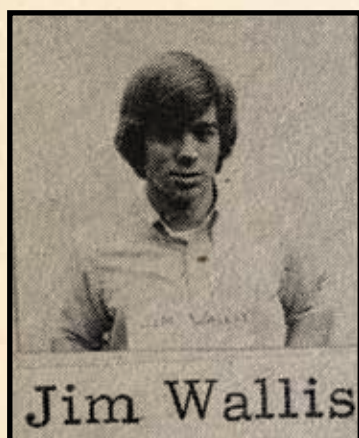
Vol. 1, No. 1

Post-American Christianity

Our first issue began with that headline, with the opening sentence: “We find ourselves in the midst of a radical awakening ...”



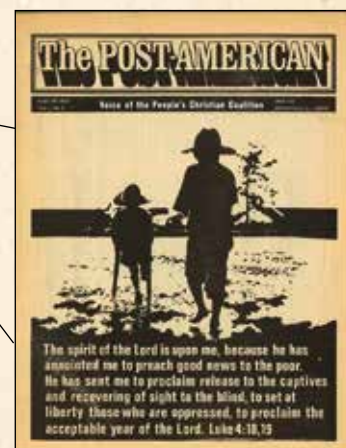
Students at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Ill., wrote and published the first editions of what would become *Sojourners* magazine, calling themselves the steering committee of the People's Christian Coalition. The photo above is from our fourth issue (Summer 1972).



***Sojourners'* founding editor** Jim Wallis, in a snapshot from the 1970 Trinity Evangelical Divinity School student directory, aka its “face book.”



Divinity student Glen Melnik, part of the early editorial team, holds the first two issues of *The Post-American*, precursor to *Sojourners*, in a dorm room at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.



Winter 1972



The ministries of Sojourners community in the first decade, which included production of the magazine, were rooted in the Washington, D.C. neighborhood of Columbia Heights. Above, magazine staffers Joe Roos, Lindsay Dubs McLaughlin, Ed Spivey Jr., and others join in worship with neighborhood children.



Sojourners magazine staff joined others in the Sojourners community in front of one of the community's houses in the Mount Pleasant neighborhood of Washington, D.C., in the mid-1970s, not long after the group arrived from Chicago.

“We believe that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a liberating force which has radical consequences for human life and society.”— from our first issue (fall 1971)



Public witness, often in the form of public worship, was an integral part of the job description of magazine staff members. Above, *Sojourners* associate editor Jim Stentzel on the White House sidewalk, part of a human rights protest against torture.



Working at Sojourners magazine in the early days was often a family affair. Above, Robert Sabath's son, Peter, helps him do research for an upcoming issue of the magazine.

March/April 1973



THE POST-AMERICAN



Fall 1972

May/June 1973



Novelist Denise Giardina, then a member of Sojourners community, discusses an article idea with associate editor Joyce Hollyday (at right), while art director Ed Spivey Jr. lends support.



Every step of the production process was labor-intensive in the early days of *Sojourners*. Copy was often produced by hand, with pen and paper, then typed and retyped several times in the editing process before being typeset and then manually laid out. Above, *Sojourners*' associate editor Nancy McCann ponders the contents of the next issue.



For the first decade of *Sojourners* magazine, subscription information was kept on paper forms and sorted by hand. Above, subscription manager David King works on a change-of-address request for a magazine subscriber.



The magazine's typesetter, Pat Campbell, makes a correction on copy—using an X-Acto knife to literally cut out the mistake—as an issue of *Sojourners* is readied for print.



Managing editor Wes Granberg-Michaelson (left) and editor Jim Wallis work on an early issue of *Sojourners*.



Editorial staff meeting. Editorial assistant (and later news editor) Phil M. Shenk, editorial assistant Ruth Ann Stoltzfus, associate editor Joyce Hollyday, and managing editor Lindsay Dubs McLaughlin discuss a forthcoming issue of *Sojourners* at an editorial staff meeting in one of our early D.C. offices.

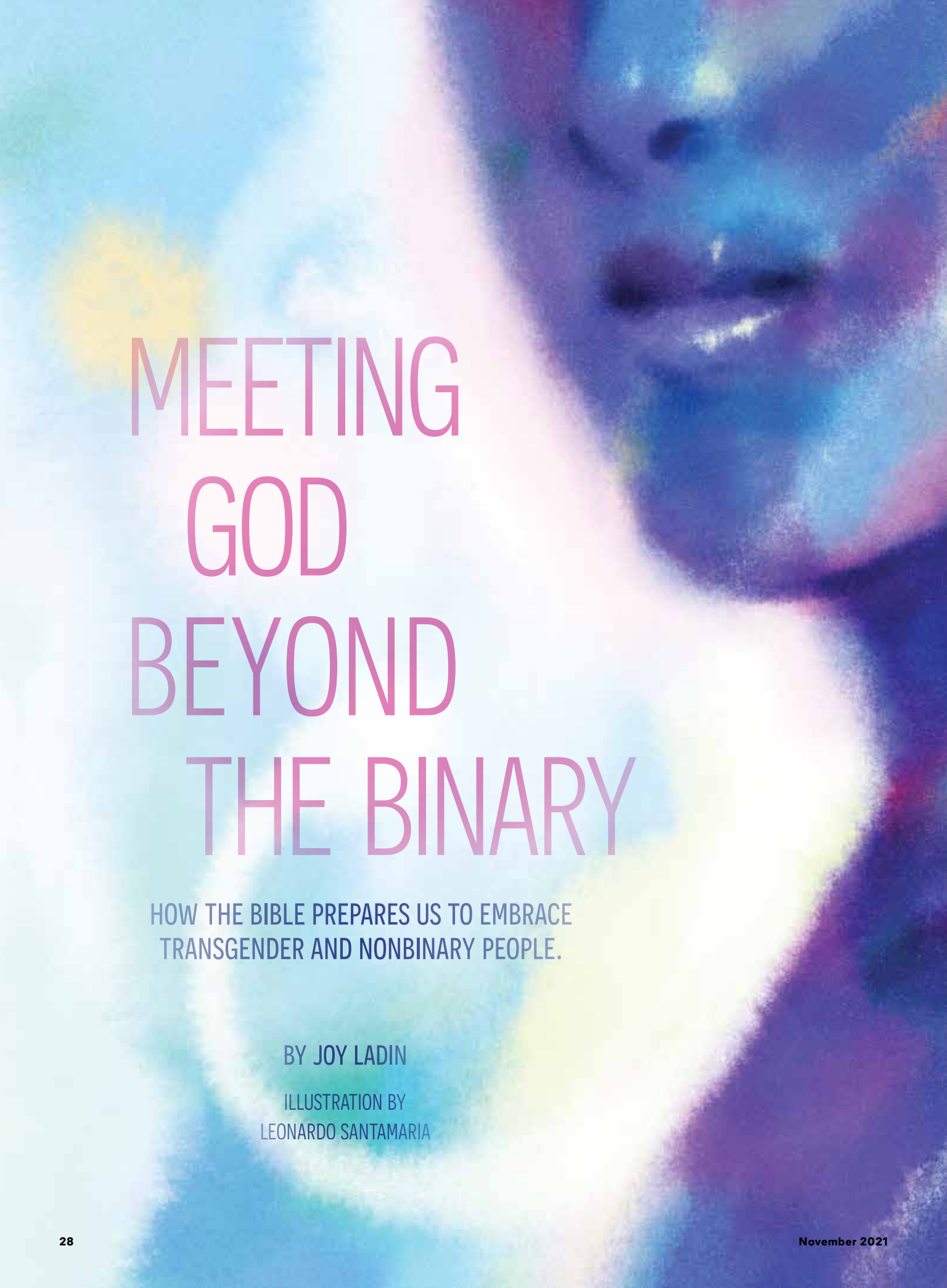


A street fair in the 1970s in the D.C. neighborhood of Columbia Heights, where *Sojourners* community, and thus *Sojourners* magazine, was based.

“Christians must be active in rejecting the values of our corrupt society, radical in our resistance and activism against the injustice of a racist society, warfare state, and materialistic system.”
—from our first issue



In the 1970s, *Sojourners* community meetings were often indistinguishable from magazine planning meetings, since issues of the magazine grew directly out of life in community and, especially in the early years, all magazine staff were members of the community. ❖



MEETING GOD BEYOND THE BINARY

HOW THE BIBLE PREPARES US TO EMBRACE
TRANSGENDER AND NONBINARY PEOPLE.

BY JOY LADIN

ILLUSTRATION BY
LEONARDO SANTAMARIA



TRANSGENDER PEOPLE HAVE BECOME A FLASH POINT IN AMERICA'S CULTURE WARS,

particularly in communities and institutions based on religious traditions that see the gender binary—the idea that human beings are always, and only, male or female—as a fixed theological principle rather than a mutable feature of human culture. The statement that God created human beings “male and female” (Genesis 1:27) is often cited as the basis for this belief, interpreted as meaning that binary gender is a divinely determined aspect of humanity—and transgender and nonbinary people, therefore, are not.

From this perspective, the gender binary is a cornerstone of the Divine-human relationship, a way in which God's conception of humanity is reflected in our bodies, our intimate relationships, our families, customs, rituals, and communities. Transgender and nonbinary people—people like me who do not identify as the gender associated with the sex of our bodies—must either be deluded or heretical, misunderstanding who God means us to be, or consciously rejecting the Divine-human relationship and opposing the divine order of creation.

Whatever our motivations, our claims that human beings can really “be” transgender or nonbinary, and that such identities should be acknowledged and respected, are seen as posing an existential threat to the religious traditions that safeguard the sacredness of family, community, and humanity.

I understand this perspective. I teach at Yeshiva University, an institution devoted to Orthodox Judaism, a religious tradition in which the gender binary is central to theology, ritual, and every aspect of personal and communal life. The gender binary is literally built into our houses of worship, which are designed with separate spaces for men and women, and often relegate women to a second-story gallery far from the pulpit.

I have never been Orthodox, but I have always been religious, by which I mean aware of and engaged with God's presence. I have also always been what we now call transgender. Even though I was born, raised, and lived until my mid-40s as a male, from my earliest childhood, I felt that I was female.

Contrary to culture war assumptions, I have never felt a conflict between being religious and being transgender. Without God's presence and help, I wouldn't have survived a childhood spent hiding who I was from a family and world I knew would reject me. God did not reject me. God had made me; God sustained me through years of suicidal depression. No matter how others see me, God is always there.

People like me prove that identifying as transgender or nonbinary is not inherently secular or at odds with religious faith. Indeed, for me, as for many of us, the difficulty of being transgender in a binary gender world led me to cling more fiercely to God.

WHO ARE WE IN RELATIONSHIP TO GOD?

As many commentaries note, the biblical assertion that God made human beings male and female does not mean God does not make people in other ways as well. Indeed, several early rabbis interpret Genesis 1:27 as meaning that the first human beings were androgynous, both male and female (see for example the Talmudic-era midrash Bereshit Rabbah,

chapter 8), and the Talmud includes a discussion of how to adapt binary-based religious laws to accommodate people we would now call intersex, whose bodies cannot be categorized as either male or female. Here and elsewhere, rabbinic comments recognize that the divine order of creation is not threatened by ways of being human that do not fit binary gender categories, and that God's conception of humanity is vaster and more varied than we can comprehend.

The existence of transgender and nonbinary people does not defy God's will; instead, we manifest God's will because, as I knew from earliest childhood, it is human culture, not God, that sorts everyone according to binary gender, and it is God, not binary gender, who determines who we are.

Because we are not mentioned in biblical texts, many who look to the Bible to understand what human beings are and should be often see transgender and nonbinary people as a threat to religious traditions and communities. Accepting that God not only makes human beings male and female but other ways as well does not require us to turn away from religious traditions and embrace secular ideas of gender. Indeed, the Bible itself prepares us to accept transgender and nonbinary people.

For example, many traditionally religious people refuse to recognize transgender and nonbinary identities because they believe that the Bible teaches that maleness and femaleness are determined by, and inseparable from, physical sex. But whenever the Bible uses male pronouns or verb forms to refer to God, it teaches us the opposite.

The Hebrew Bible does not refer to God as “he” in order for us to associate God as physically male. Indeed, the first of the Ten Commandments prohibits identifying God in terms of anything “in heaven above, or on the earth beneath” (Exodus 20:4). Instead, it is patriarchal traditions that interpret male pronouns in a way that associates God with human ideas of maleness and masculinity—that is, with maleness as gender, not physiology—and thus associate human maleness and masculinity with God. But even as these interpretations reflect and reinforce patriarchal ideas of gender (by identifying God, who has no body, as male), they also teach us to think of gender as independent of physical sex, as a way of understanding *who* rather than *what* God is. That is how transgender and nonbinary people think of gender: as a way of identifying *who* we are, not *what* kind of bodies we have.

‘NEITHER GOD NOR I FIT BINARY GENDER CATEGORIES’

Of course, many religious people would argue that no matter what pronouns the Bible uses, God cannot be understood in terms of human gender. I completely agree. From the time I began reading the Bible as a child, I knew that God couldn't be what human beings mean by male or female. That gave me a sense of kinship with God: Neither of us fit binary gender categories, and both of us were invisible and incomprehensible to those we loved.

From the beginning of Genesis, when God creates the physical universe, the Bible makes it clear that God can't be understood and shouldn't be conceived of in terms of human categories such as gender.

Moses hears God speaking through the bush that burns and is not consumed; the Israelites experience God's presence in thunder and lightning at Mount Sinai; Elijah identifies God in the "still, small voice" outside his cave; God works miracles such as the plagues of Egypt and manna in the wilderness; Psalm 147 reminds us of God in mundane wonders such as rain and grass and snow. Over and over, the Bible teaches us that we don't need God to fit binary gender categories to recognize God's presence, to feel God's love, or to put God at the center of our communities and our lives.

Human beings are made in the image of this category-defying God.

The Bible tells us three times that we are made in the category-defying image (once in Genesis 1:26 and twice in 1:27) before it mentions sexual dimorphism, physical maleness and femaleness (which, as the story of Noah's ark reminds us, is common among humans and animals alike). To God, what makes us human is not that we are made male and female: It is that we are made in the image of our Creator who, unlike the deities featured in Iron Age creation myths, has neither body nor sex nor gender.

DID ABRAM AND SARAI SHED THEIR ASSIGNED GENDER ROLES?

The existence of transgender and nonbinary people does not contradict what the Bible teaches us about God's conception of humanity. Our existence reinforces that teaching by demonstrating the difference between the gender categories human beings rely on to identify one another and the image of God by which God identifies us.

It can be hard to make that distinction because, in both secular and religious communities, so many roles, relationships, rituals, customs, and institutions require us to identify and be identified in terms of binary gender that it is easy to think of maleness and femaleness not as categories we are assigned at birth but as unchangeable essences that define who and what we are—or, many religious people say, who and what God created us to be.

But one of the Bible's most famous stories makes it clear that God means us to be more than the gender roles we are born into, and that sometimes God calls us to leave those roles behind and live lives our families and communities do not understand.

According to the Bible, the starting point for what would become Judaism is the moment when Abram—who, as Terah's first-born son, is expected to care for his father all his life and assume his father's position after his death—hears God say, "Go from your country, your people, and your father's household to the land I will show you" (Genesis 12:1). If God had created human beings to be always and only the men or women we are born, raised, and expected to be, then Abram would have said no. And if Abram had believed that he was and could only be what his culture said a first-born male should be (with all the rights and responsibilities of inheritance in a primogeniture system), then the Bible as we know it would never have been written.

"Real men don't abandon their fathers," Abram might have said to himself, "and real gods don't tell people to violate ancient traditions and sacred family duties." Or maybe Abram would have believed, as trans and nonbinary people are often told to believe, that the voice summoning him to live the life God created him to live was not the voice of truth but the voice of temptation, irresponsibility, selfishness, deviance, delusion, and sin.

Abram didn't let being a first-born son stop him from recognizing and answering God's call. He left behind the gender role he was born into and the identity and responsibilities that went along with it and accepted a new identity, one defined not by his relationship to his family or his people but by his relationship with God.

God also called Sarai, Abram's wife, beyond assigned gender roles when God tells her she will bear a child in extreme old age. Sarai's miraculous conception confounds traditional binary gender roles—without divine intervention, being both a new mother and an elderly woman is impossible—as well as the gender binary assumption that biology (in this case, Sarai's age) determines who we are.

Again and again, the Bible highlights people—Abram, Sarai, Moses, Deborah and other Hebrew prophets, and Jesus and the apostles—who answer God's call to stop being the men and women their families and cultures expect them to be and let God, not gender, define them.

That's what I did when, after decades of pretending to be a man I knew I wasn't, I realized that—even though it would cost me my family, friends, and job—I had to live as the person God created me to be.

My life as an openly transgender person is not a rejection of God

or the Bible: It is an expression of the truth God planted within me, my way of bearing witness to the incomprehensible image of God in which, the Bible teaches, each of us, trans or not, is made. ✱

TO GOD, WHAT MAKES US
HUMAN IS NOT THAT WE ARE MADE
MALE AND FEMALE: IT IS THAT WE ARE
MADE IN THE IMAGE OF OUR CREATOR.

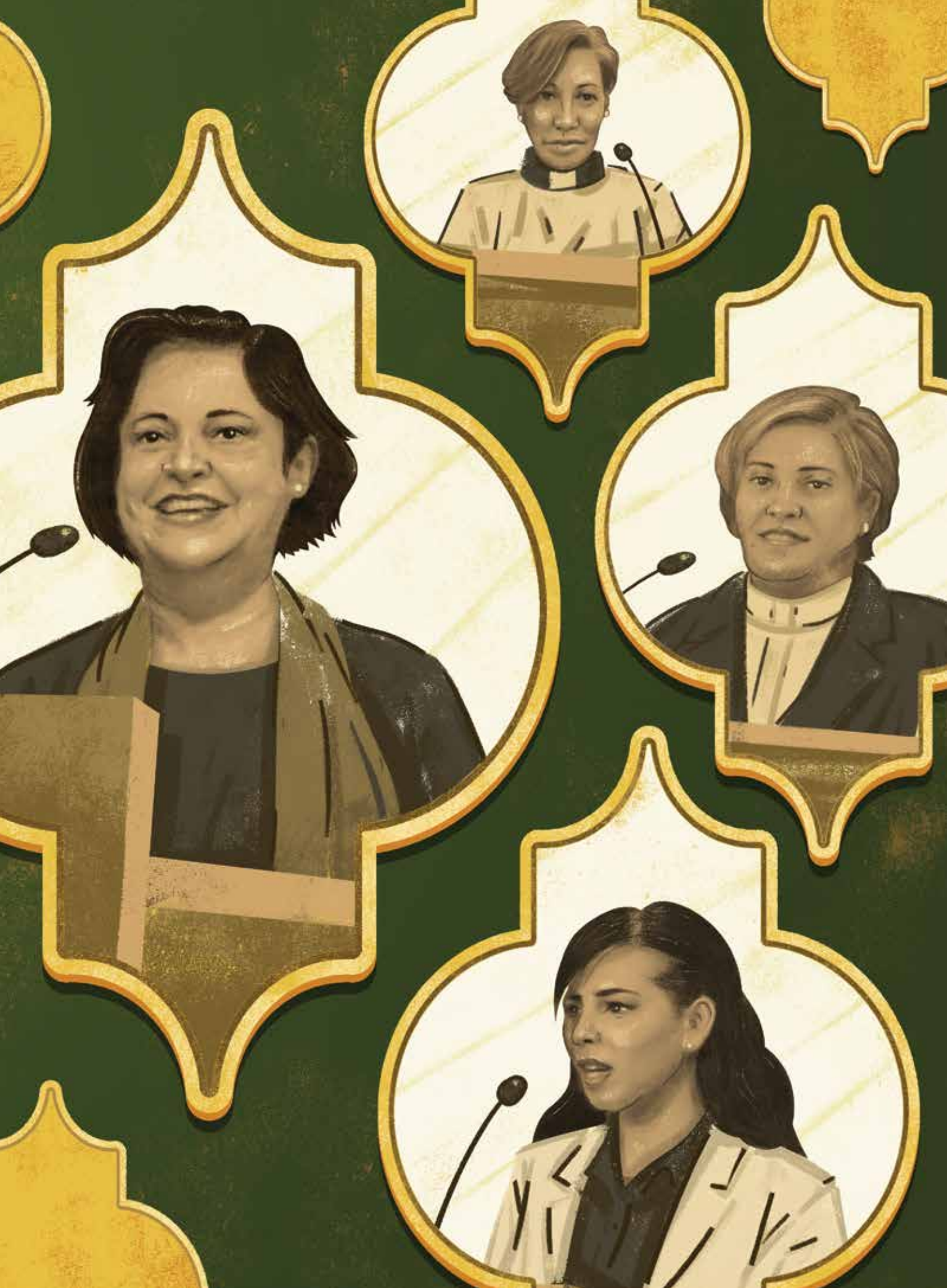
Joy Ladin, author of *The Soul of the Stranger: Reading God and Torah from a Transgender Perspective*, is a professor of English and holds the David and Ruth Gottesman Chair in English at Stern College of Yeshiva University in New York.

Rising Above the Stained-Glass Ceiling

In the Middle East, a growing number of women are claiming their place in the pulpit.

By Mae Elise Cannon
Illustration by Raz Latif







For years, women called to leadership in the church in the Middle East have faced a stained-glass ceiling of limitations imposed by the surrounding patriarchal culture and theological presuppositions about the role of women in the church. But while some interpretations of Paul's instructions to the early church (such as Timothy 2:12) are used as a rationale for limiting the role of women, long-standing cultural traditions regarding women's roles in religion and society have played a more prominent, and more difficult, role.

"Although religion bears major responsibility for the inferior status of women, it cannot be solely blamed for the gender problem in the Middle East," according to a report on "Women in the Middle East" published by the Institute for Policy Studies. "In reality, the role of culture has been even more prominent in perpetuating the oppression of women."

Most denominations in the Middle East (other than Orthodox communions and the Catholic Church) do not prevent the ordination of women for *theological* reasons. And many Protestant communions, such as the Lutherans and Presbyterians—which have been present in the Middle East since 19th century missionary encounters—ordain women in churches around the world. While Orthodox churches do not have women in positions of clerical leadership, Father George Massouh, then-head of the Center for Christian-Muslim Studies at the University of Balamand in Lebanon, explained in 2017 that the reason is not because of "theological hindrance." Rather, Massouh said, the absence of ordained women in Eastern churches "was due to social customs"—the Orthodox church, he said, "has no such tradition, whether in Lebanon or anywhere else in the world."

Middle Eastern society places profound expectations on women in family life, obliging them to prepare meals, serve male family members, and take care of children. Some of these expectations come from the influence of conservative Islam. In places such as Saudi Arabia, restrictions are extreme, at times segregating women from men, preventing women from driving and attending social functions and public events, forcing female genital mutilation, and expecting women to veil or cover their bodies. While

not as extreme in other countries in the region, women must continuously prove their abilities and competencies in the workplace, especially within the church where their roles are often relegated to the care of children and hospitality ministries.

Yet, in recent years, women have begun to claim their place in the pulpit, challenging not only established views of who gets to preach but also who gets to follow their calling in the broader society.

What has changed to allow these women to pursue the pulpit? Low birth rates, emigration, and regional conflicts have resulted in a decrease in church attendance, and great need has begun to open doors not only to service in ministry but also to preaching and receiving the mantle of authority that comes with ordination. Now, women who answer the call have the support of a small but growing network of courageous women stepping into positions of authority in the church in the Middle East.

'MANY PEOPLE ARE WAITING'

Growing up in the Lutheran church in Jerusalem, Sally Azar always wanted to be involved in ministry. From a young age, she engaged in youth programs and activities and felt a stirring in her heart, calling her toward leadership. Her father, Sani Ibrahim Azar, served at the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem. He connected his daughter with Munib Younan, a Palestinian who was then bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land. Younan mentored Azar and encouraged her to pursue theological education. In 2018, Azar graduated from the Near East School of Theology in Beirut. Now 25, Azar is completing her pastoral internship with a Lutheran church in Berlin. Upon her return home to Jerusalem, Azar will be ordained at Jerusalem's Church of the Redeemer. She will be the first Arab woman pastor to serve in Palestine and the fourth Arab woman to serve in pastoral ministry and church leadership in the Middle East.

According to Sani Azar, who is now bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, it will be difficult for Sally Azar to find a full pastoral position in Palestine that includes baptizing, preaching, serving communion, and performing the sacraments. She will experience resistance from locals who believe women should not be pastors. But according to her father, "Many people are waiting for her [ordination] and are eager to support her. Her becoming a pastor

gives us hope for our society, that things can change."

Sally Azar's journey is unique because much of her practical ministry experience has taken place in Europe, and the churches she will serve in Palestine are in cities that tend to be more open to women leaders. She works hard to relate to the people in her church by engaging in ministry that is accessible and relevant. For example, she preaches in *ammiya* (the language of the people) rather than *fusha* (formal, literary Arabic). While Azar knows there will be some resistance in traditional communities such as Beit Jala, a neighboring village to Bethlehem, she said she's willing to try. While some people have told her they won't come to church if a woman preaches, she said others have been more supportive, telling her, "We want to have more preachers like you."

The first three Arab women ordained and in ministry in the region all serve in Lebanon. Many identify Rev. Rola Sleiman as the first Arab female pastor there. Since 2017, Sleiman has served as pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Tripoli and is the first woman to serve as a Minister of Word and Sacrament through her ordination by the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon. Sleiman was followed in her ordination by Rima Nasrallah, ordained by the National Evangelical Church of Beirut, who now serves as the assistant professor of practical theology at the Near East School of Theology (NEST). Nasrallah taught theology to Azar and encouraged her and other students to include women's perspectives in their studies and thinking. The significance of Nasrallah's current role—as an academic theologian in Beirut teaching young people to understand the need for all people to be free to use their gifts in the church—cannot be overstated. The future of women in the church in the Middle East will be greatly influenced by what young theological students are taught in seminary about the role of women in ministry.

Rev. Najla Kassab, also a graduate of NEST and Princeton Theological Seminary, became the third woman to be ordained in the Middle East when she was awarded full pastoral ordination in March 2017. Kassab had served in the church for decades; she had received her preaching license almost 30 years earlier, in 1993. Kassab is now president of the World Communion of Reformed Churches and director of the Christian Education Department of the Synod of Syria and Lebanon.

Kassab said her journey has only been possible because she knows she's not alone and trusts that she has been called and ordained by God. When she received her preaching license, men threatened to leave the church, and she said she worried she was "causing trouble." But over time, she came to believe women in leadership in the church are essential, and she knows the Holy Spirit was leading her. "The journey of changing minds and attitudes remains a daily struggle," Kassab said. "Women have to challenge patriarchal thinking, presenting a new model of leadership where authority is shared ... [but] emphasizing the role of women in the church is at the heart of the gospel."

Some feel, Kassab said, that the elevation of women in leadership in the church represents the undue influence of the West or a "human rights invasion" that is not biblically justified. While many Protestant churches in Lebanon have their roots tied to Western missionary involvement, these church communities still maintain cultural mandates and expectations present in the Middle East that continue to limit the role of women. "Women have to continually prove their abilities to be accepted at the time when men are accepted with easier requirements and limited reservations," Kassab said.

When asked how she stays strong amid such significant resistance, Kassab spoke of the solidarity found in partnership with other women going through similar struggles. She said she seeks to focus on the ministry at hand and not succumb to "negative attitudes" that drain her energy. Kassab encouraged women in ministry not to fall into "competition traps or comparison attitudes," but rather to be encouraging of one another. In addition, she said, the "younger generation of male leaders" have a lot of work to do in reducing the pressure on women and working for change.

'THIS WALL MUST COME DOWN'

The liberation of women benefits not only the individual women who are elevated; it ultimately serves the needs of the entire church and broader community. As scripture puts it, the church cannot thrive if any part of the body suffers (1 Corinthians). When women are limited in their ability to use their gifts, the church misses out. The church cannot function in full capacity and flourishing unless all its components work together in harmony. Ultimately, the churches that have the greatest impact

in society are the ones where the entire community engages together, side by side, in active mobilization in response to community needs.

Consider the circumstances of Sleiman's ordination. Sleiman stepped into leadership during the July 2006 war between Israel and Lebanon. George Bitar, the male senior pastor of her church, could not return home because of the conflict, so Sleiman led the church for six months. Bitar later moved to the United States with his family. Sleiman remained the church's pastor, holding it together amid war and conflict. Sleiman told Al-Jazeera that she just "fell into the role" of being pastor of the church, because she was needed. She responded to the needs of her church community, she said, because "I felt there was something that I had to do here, in my hometown ... I just felt that I had to go." Pastor Sleiman's acceptance into the community was gradual, ultimately coming to fruition in her call to ordination through a secret vote in 2017.

Sally Azar credits much of the success of her own journey to the women who broke through the stained-glass ceiling before her. She spoke of Sleiman's ordination process with awe, citing what an inspiration it was to see Sleiman acknowledged and called to leadership. "Knowing Revs. Sleiman, Kassab, and Nasrallah strengthens me and is a big privilege," she said. "They as well have a strong and supportive community and church around them. They deal with the pushbacks in a very calm and loving way, which leads the people to respect them and accept them."

Palestinian theologian Grace Al-Zoughbi longs for the church in the Middle East to fully include women in theological education and leadership. Before Azar's ordination, Al-Zoughbi pointed to the (slowly) increasing number of ordained women in the region as an opportunity for real change. Most of the people who attend churches in the Middle East are women. And while their

attendance has implications, their potential ordination harbors even more. When more women become educated theologically, then patriarchal systems, ideologies, and structures are challenged and, ultimately, shift toward inclusivity.

During the 2018 Christ at the Checkpoint conference in Bethlehem, Shireen Awwad Hilal, director of Bethlehem Bible College's Community and Development Outreach, called for an end to the exclusion of women from leadership in the church. "When my Palestinian community denies us a chance to speak equally, when the international community is not interested in actively supporting Palestinian women ... this results in creating a big wall, exactly like the segregation wall we have around the West Bank," she said. "This wall divides our community, it divides men and women, it keeps women from being able to use their gifts in the context of church and society, and this wall must come down."

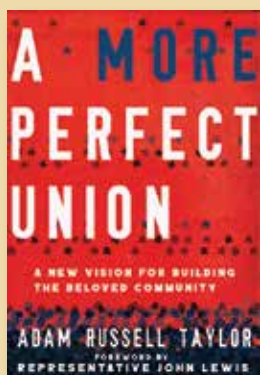
Sally Azar's rise into ministry in the church represents a part of that dividing wall coming down. Carrie Ballenger, pastor of the English-speaking congregation of Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem, said, "The next step is for our church to encourage other young women to enter the ministry so Sally will not be alone in her work."

Whispers of other women pursuing ordination, such as a young woman in Syria, emphasize the growing trend of women in the Middle East seeing more opportunities. As more and more women are empowered to use their gifts in the church, cracks appear in the stained-glass ceiling. ♦

**"The journey of
changing minds and
attitudes remains a
daily struggle."**

Mae Elise Cannon is ordained in Word and Sacrament in the Evangelical Covenant Church. She serves as executive director of Churches for Middle East Peace and is the author of several books, including *A Land Full of God: Christian Perspectives on the Holy Land*.

GREAT READS / Books to inform and inspire



A More Perfect Union: A New Vision for Building the Beloved Community

Adam Russell Taylor
Broadleaf Books
broadleafbooks.com

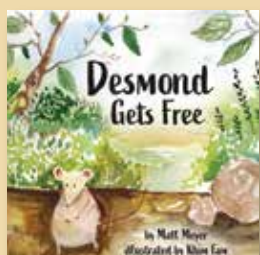
From the president of Sojourners, a bold and actionable call to unite our fractured country through a contemporary reimagining of Martin Luther King Jr.'s Beloved Community.



Black Hands, White House: Slave Labor and the Making of America

Renee K. Harrison
Fortress Press
fortresspress.com

This book bears witness to the role enslaved, Black-bodied people played in building the U.S., its physical and fiscal infrastructure, including the nation's capital, and calls for a substantial monument to affirm and document their contributions. This book is a significant addition to the burgeoning conversations on racial disparity.



Desmond Gets Free

Matt Meyer, illustrated by Khim Fam
Skinner House Books
bookshop.org

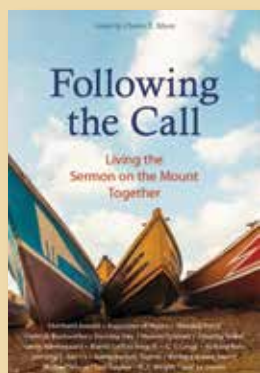
With a thoughtful story and lush watercolor illustrations, *Desmond Gets Free* introduces young readers to timely and nuanced concepts of justice and liberation in a kid-friendly way. Inspired by a famous parable from Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Ages 4-8



Disorderly Parable Bible Studies

Dr. April Love-Fordham
Wipf and Stock Publishers
aprillovefordham.com

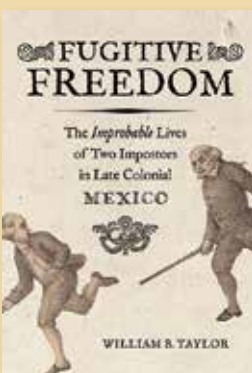
Winner of the 2021 Silver Medal for Christian Books, this series weaves together a modern-day story with serious biblical exegesis and historical research, creating a challenging call to action without ever being dry. Contains suggested spiritual practices and discussion questions. Now available: Galatians, James, and Song of Solomon.



Following the Call: Living the Sermon on the Mount Together

Edited by Charles E. Moore
Plough Publishing
plough.com/FollowingTheCall

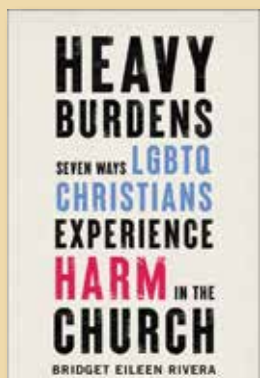
Fifty-two readings to spark weekly discussion on the Sermon on the Mount. With selections from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, C.S. Lewis, Dorothy Day, N.T. Wright, Barbara Brown Taylor and others, this book is designed to be read together, to inspire communities of faith to put Jesus' teachings into practice today.



Fugitive Freedom: The Improbable Lives of Two Impostors in Late Colonial Mexico

William B. Taylor
University of California Press
ucpress.edu

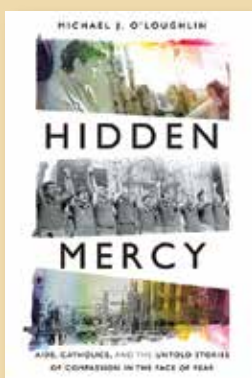
Fugitive Freedom locates two suspect strangers, Joseph Aguayo and Juan Atondo, both priest impersonators and petty villains in central Mexico during the last years of Spanish rule. William B. Taylor provides a rare opportunity to examine the social histories and inner lives of two individuals at the margins.



Heavy Burdens: Seven Ways LGBTQ Christians Experience Harm in the Church

Bridget Eileen Rivera
Brazos Press
Available wherever books and ebooks are sold

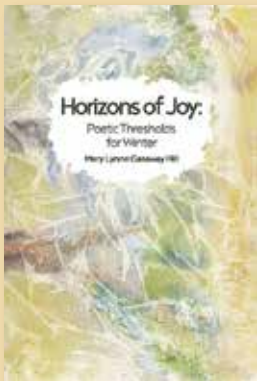
Generations of LGBTQ people have been alienated or condemned by Christian communities. It's past time that Christians confronted the ongoing, devastating effects of this legacy. *Heavy Burdens* lists seven ways LGBTQ people experience discrimination in the church, helping Christians and churches across the theological spectrum navigate better paths forward.



Hidden Mercy: AIDS, Catholics, and the Untold Stories of Compassion in the Face of Fear

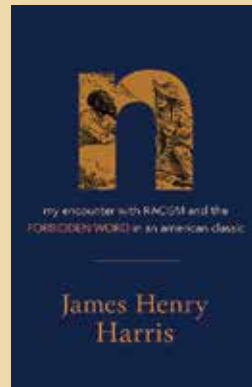
Michael J. O'Loughlin
Broadleaf Books
broadleafbooks.com

An award-winning journalist and gay Catholic, Michael J. O'Loughlin uncovers the complex and layered stories of the hidden Catholic response to the AIDS crisis of 1980s and 1990s America and lessons we can learn today.



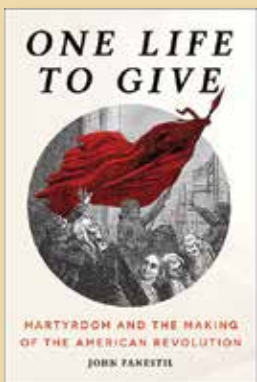
Horizons of Joy: Poetic Thresholds for Winter
 Mary Lynne Gasaway Hill
 River Lily Press
 Available wherever books are sold

Horizons of Joy: Poetic Thresholds for Winter invites us to a captivating blend of poetry, meditations, and word stories, guiding us and the Magi who walk with us, through the days shortening and the nights deepening, at the threshold of the winter solstice. Companion journal also available.



N: My Encounter with Racism and the Forbidden Word in an American Classic
 James Henry Harris
 Fortress Press
 fortresspress.com

A Black man's experience of reading Mark Twain's classic *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* for the first time, this book captures the author's struggle with Twain's use of the racial epithet more than 200 times in the text. Harris inspires readers to redress the long history of American racism and white supremacy bound up with the N-word.



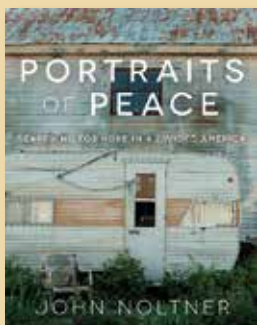
One Life to Give: Martyrdom and the Making of the American Revolution
 John Fanestil
 Fortress Press
 fortresspress.com

One Life to Give explores martyrdom from its classical and Christian origins to the onset of the Revolutionary War. Fanestil shows how martyrdom animated many personal commitments to American independence, and thereby to the war. Understanding the role of martyrdom helps the reader grasp the origins of the American Revolution.



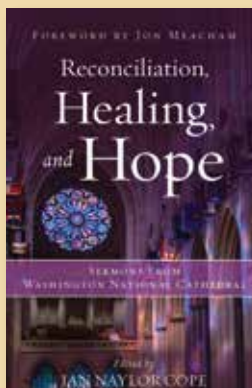
Our Fair Share: How One Small Change Can Create a More Equitable American Economy
 Brian C. Johnson
 Broadleaf Books
 broadleafbooks.com

Through a combination of accessible research and diverse first-person accounts, *Our Fair Share* lays the foundation for a bold solution to the rising economic inequality facing the U.S., binding us together for a better future.



Portraits of Peace: Searching for Hope in a Divided America
 John Noltner
 Broadleaf Books
 broadleafbooks.com

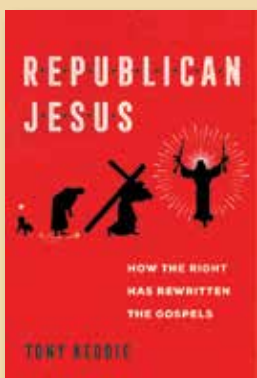
In the style of "Humans of New York," photographer John Noltner pairs captivating photographs with real-life stories to capture the shared humanity that unites us in the pursuit of peace in our divided nation.



Reconciliation, Healing, and Hope: Sermons from Washington National Cathedral

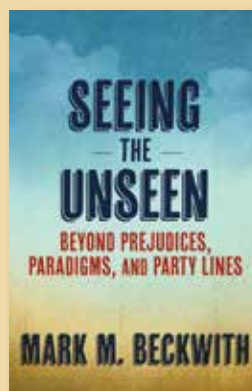
Edited by Jan Naylor Cope, foreword by Jon Meacham
 Morehouse Publishing
 Available wherever books are sold

Preachers such as Jon Meacham and Episcopal Presiding Bishop Michael B. Curry share inspiring words amid the pandemic. Collectively, they offer lasting guidance for difficult times, reinforcing that even during loss and chaos, God is at work among us, lifting us up and giving us hope for the future.



Republican Jesus: How the Right Has Rewritten the Gospels
 Tony Keddie
 University of California Press
 ucpress.edu

In *Republican Jesus*, Tony Keddie explains where the right-wing Christ came from and also why this version of Jesus is a fraud. By restoring Republicans' cherry-picked gospel texts to their original literary and historical contexts, Keddie dismantles the biblical basis for Republican positions on hot-button issues.



Seeing the Unseen: Beyond Prejudices, Paradigms, and Party Lines
 Mark M. Beckwith
 Morehouse Publishing
 Available wherever books are sold

The author, an Episcopal bishop and anti-gun-violence activist, offers a way forward from opposing viewpoints. Instead of dismissing those whose views and experiences are different from our own, the author argues that we must look directly at them and see the goodness that is inherent in all things.

GREAT READS / Books to inform and inspire

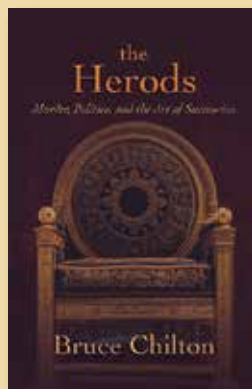
SPECIAL ADVERTISING SECTION



Still Stace: My Gay Christian Coming-of-Age Story

Stacey Chomiak
Beaming Books
beamingbooks.com

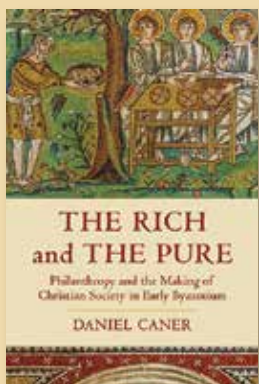
The first book for young adults about the LGBTQ+ experience of coming of age in the conservative Christian faith, *Still Stace* is author and illustrator Stacey Chomiak's authentically quirky memoir of heartbreak, family conflict, trying to become ex-gay, wrestling with her faith, and finding love.



The Herods: Murder, Politics, and the Art of Succession

Bruce Chilton
Fortress Press
fortresspress.com

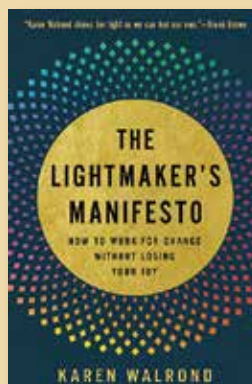
The Herods explores the Herodian rule from Herod the Great's father, Antipater, until the dynastic sunset with Bereniké, Herod's great-granddaughter, describing the theocratic aims that motivated Herod and his progeny, and the groups and factions within Judaism and Christianity that often defined themselves in opposition to the Herodian project.



The Rich and the Pure: Philanthropy and the Making of Christian Society in Early Byzantium

Daniel Caner
University of California Press
ucpress.edu

In this cultural and social history, Daniel Caner shows how philanthropy required living up to Jesus' injunction to "give to all who ask of you" by offering mercy and/or material aid to every human being. Caner shows how Christian philanthropy became articulated through distinct religious ideals of giving.



The Lightmaker's Manifesto: How to Work for Change Without Losing Your Joy

Karen Walrond
Broadleaf Books
broadleafbooks.com

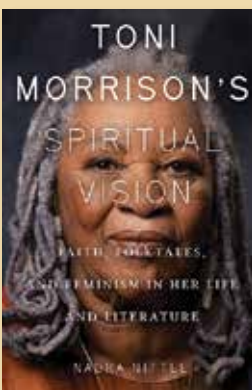
Through engaging exercises and conversations with changemakers like Valarie Kaur, Brené Brown, and Tarana Burke, leadership coach and activist Karen Walrond shows readers how to tap their passions and gifts to joyfully advocate for justice, peace, and liberation.



There Is No God and Mary Is His Mother: Rediscovering Religionless Christianity

Thomas Cathcart
Fortress Press
fortresspress.com

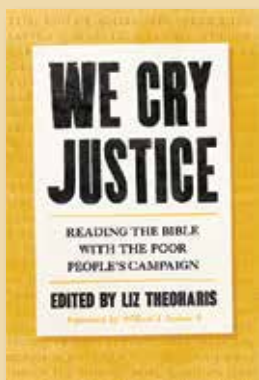
In this personal, witty, and timely book, *New York Times* bestselling author Thomas Cathcart takes readers on a journey into belief and unbelief and leads them through to "religionless Christianity." He shows that, even absent traditional theological formulas and doctrines, Christianity can be credible, meaningful, and practical.



Toni Morrison's Spiritual Vision: Faith, Folktales, and Feminism in Her Life and Literature

Nadra Nittle
Fortress Press
fortresspress.com

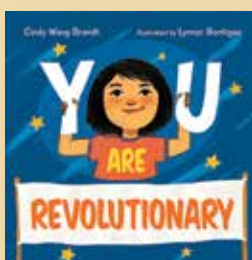
Toni Morrison's Spiritual Vision unpacks an oft-ignored but essential element of her work—her religion—and in so doing gives readers a deeper, richer understanding of her life and her writing. Nadra Nittle's wide-ranging, deep exploration of Morrison's oeuvre reveals the role of religion and spirituality in her life and literature.



We Cry Justice: Reading the Bible with the Poor People's Campaign

Edited by Liz Theoharis, foreword by William J. Barber II
Broadleaf Books
broadleafbooks.com

Leaders and organizers with the Poor People's Campaign offer powerful reflections on and interpretations of Bible passages through the lens of the disinherited, providing a new understanding of justice and a call to fight poverty, not the poor.



You Are Revolutionary

Cindy Wang Brandt, illustrated by Lynnor Bontigao
Beaming Books
beamingbooks.com

This inspiring picture book, written by a parenting expert who specializes in children's empowerment, invites kids to see themselves as revolutionaries who have the power to change the world.

FOR ALL MANKIND BELIEVES TRAVEL TO THE MOON WILL SOLVE RACISM. IT'S NOT THAT SIMPLE.

By Mitchell Atencio



O

One does not need to look hard to find a new myth forming about the great beyond. The narrative is that space travel will solve our woes—specifically the

woes of racial capitalism. And this myth is appearing everywhere, in reality and fiction.

Take, for example, billionaire Richard Branson's com-

Television

ments before Virgin Galactic's suborbital mission in early July.

"Imagine a world where people of all ages, all backgrounds from anywhere, of any gender, or any ethnicity have equal access to space," Branson told the press. "And they will in turn, I think, inspire us back here on Earth."

Branson and fellow billionaire Jeff Bezos



are in a 21st century space race, trying to justify their extreme spending to commercialize the cosmos with the idea that space travel can dissolve a litany of struggles.

The new space race is not so different from the first—the winner advances their power and reach. Between the 1950s and 1970s, the United States and the Soviet Union raced to space, then to the moon, largely for the same reason. The U.S., it might be said, won the space race by being the first to the moon (and we are still the only nation to have ever put people on the moon).

But what if things were different? This is the question explored by *For All Mankind* (Apple TV+), which released its second season in April. It is an exploration of a world in which the Soviets win the race to the moon, thereby extending the space race in perpetuity. The first season takes place in the '70s, the second jumps to 1983, and the decade-jump trend will continue for all seven seasons, according to the creators.

There is much to like about the show. The concept itself is intriguing. The visuals are immense—who doesn't love watching rocket ships blast off and land on the lunar surface? The acting is superb. The portrayals of Ed Baldwin, Molly Cobb, Gordo Stevens, and Ellen Wilson (by Joel Kinnaman, Sonya Walger, Michael Dorman, and Jodi Balfour, respectively) are filled with the complexity and joy of being human.

The show relishes—as it should—opportunities to make changes to the historical record. Most of these are fun and frivolous—John Lennon lives! Ted Kennedy becomes president! Others serve to advance current

left-of-center commitments to diversity—'70s NASA is racially diverse and gender inclusive!

But where one might expect a retroactive look at the United States to offer nuance and critique, the show never fails to advance the idea that capitalism is good, and even when it isn't, communism is worse.

Among the implications of this narrative: Because of space travel, electric cars would be normal in 1983 (a small nod that the climate crisis is averted), the United States leaves Vietnam earlier than in reality, and an undocumented immigrant is welcomed by her colleagues in the Reagan administration.

While the diverse casting is to be applauded, even this displays the type of diversity that capitalism is willing to achieve: The show has a number of gay, Black, brown, and female characters, but it is dominated mostly by straight, cis, white men. It is the type of diversity we see in "multiracial churches" and "diverse businesses" with all-white leadership.

The willingness to embrace fictional diversity (within government, to be clear), but an unwillingness to deal with the tensions that would follow, is maybe the farthest stretch on the show.

In one scene, astronaut Danielle Poole, who is Black, confronts her friend and supervisor Ed Baldwin about the lack of diversity among NASA's space missions and requests she be made the lead of a mission. Baldwin defends NASA in the way white people often do.

"You have to understand, these things take time," he whines. "We've dealt with this issue," he insists, unable to name the issue.

And yet, minutes later, Baldwin demands that Poole lead Apollo-Soyuz—a mission NASA leadership deems useless, unachievable, and purely performative—in the name of equity. Meanwhile, he takes the most prestigious mission for himself. None of this is presented by the writers as ironic—if anything, Baldwin appears praise-worthy for giving his colleague a junk mission.

In the end, Apollo-Soyuz saves both countries from war. But all these scenes reveal something about how *For All Mankind* envisions racial equity **cont'd on page 45**

**BLACK PEOPLE ARE
SUPPOSED TO
ADVOCATE FOR
THEMSELVES, MAKE
THE MOST OF THE
JUNK GIVEN TO
THEM, AND SAVE
THE WORLD.**

On Screen



New & Noteworthy

UNSUNG BELONGING

Serenade is a collaborative album dedicated to LGBTQIA+ youth of faith. Produced by Gretta and Kyle Miller of the band Tow'rs, this multigenre and multiartist project explores the "hope and heartbreak" of living as a queer person of faith.

Beloved Arise Media



PRIMETIME MOURNING

By Da'Shawn Mosley

I

wouldn't wish on anyone the narrative dilemma facing the writers of *United States of Al*. The CBS show is a buddy comedy about a young Afghan man who finally gets a visa to come to the U.S., thanks to a Marine, Riley, for whom he was an interpreter during the Afghanistan

War, whose life he saved, and with whom he's living in the States. But *United States of Al*'s second season, with an Oct. 7 premiere, may need to encompass even more grief than its predecessor. The U.S. has withdrawn from Afghanistan, and the Taliban has taken over. We've seen the video of Afghan people trying to hold on to a U.S. military plane as it takes off, the clip ending right before some of them fall. Human remains were later found in the plane's wheel well. What will happen when *United States of Al*'s protagonist sees that video?

I'm reminded of a season one episode in which Awalmir Karimi, nicknamed "Al," can't get in touch with his family, who still live in Afghanistan. Their silence is like that which surrounds Riley's sister, Lizzie, whose husband, another friend of Riley, was killed in the war. By the end of the episode, Al learns his family is safe (they had been out of touch due to a local power outage). He can relax.

I may not be able to sell *United States of Al* on its comedy chops, since it deals with issues such as Riley battling his "feelings crap" and suffering from tinnitus, which he doesn't want to admit may be remnants from his time on the battlefield. It's not that the show is always sad. It's that it's a classic CBS comedy; Chuck Lorre (*Two and a Half Men*, *The Big Bang Theory*) is an executive producer. It's

formulaically funny, and there's a laugh track.

The show has heart, though: Its characters—from Vanessa, Riley's ex-wife, to Art, Riley's veteran father—care deeply for each other, and their love makes the show hard to turn away from. The show has been criticized for what some call stereotypical portrayals, but the writers' room of seven includes four writers with Afghan roots. Al is played by an actor of Indian and South African descent, not Afghan. But, religion scholar and show producer Reza Aslan defends the choice: "There are five Afghan characters in the show and four of them are played by Afghans." And why is Awalmir's name shortened—to make his character more palatable?

The show's creators have addressed the concerns—perhaps not adequately enough for detractors, but the show goes on. Awalmir will render onscreen some of the devastating pain the Afghan writers of *United States of Al* have had to re-live offscreen. ♦

Da'Shawn Mosley, a former *Sojourners* associate editor, lives in the Washington, D.C. metro area.

A New Reformation

In *Atando Cabos: Latinx Contributions to Theological Education*, Elizabeth Conde-Frazier explores the future of U.S. Christianity as it makes space for Latinx practices and traditions. Cognizant of the theological education's history as a tool of colonization, Conde-Frazier's practical models of pedagogy and epistemology offer another way.

Eerdmans



To Dwell in Peace

Bill Wylie-Kellermann reflects on the life and legacy of his friend and co-conspirator for justice in *Celebrant's Flame: Daniel Berrigan in Memory and Reflection*. This heartfelt memoir illuminates the life and writings of Berrigan as anti-war activist, priest, brother, chaplain, and "prisoner-poet."

Cascade Books



THE DANGER OF DEEPAKES

By Danny
Duncan Collum

**DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY
CONSISTENTLY OUTRUNS OUR
CAPACITY TO MANAGE IT.**



Eyes & Ears

Deepfakes—digital creations in which people appear to be saying and doing things they never did or said—have been around for a while now, mostly as jokey, obviously satirical clips on

the internet. In the past decade, the technology has been widely used in entertainment. Carrie Fisher was faked into *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker*. A hologram of Tupac Shakur headlined the 2012 Coachella festival, one of Whitney Houston is about to play Vegas, etc. But this year, in *Roadrunner*, a documentary about the late celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain, a line was crossed.

On the surface, what *Roadrunner*'s director Morgan Neville did seems like no big deal. He hired a tech company to use digital recordings of Bourdain's voice to generate audio clips of Bourdain saying things that he wrote but never said aloud. In an age when we've become used to documentaries, and even straight news stories, using reenactments of events that weren't caught on camera, this may seem pretty harmless. However, when responsible documentarians and journalists use reenactments, they clearly identify them as such. Neville—an Oscar, Emmy, and Directors Guild Award winner whose films include *20 Feet from Stardom* and *Won't You Be My Neighbor?*—did no such thing. In response to a *New Yorker* reporter's questions, he admitted using the deepfake technique, but at the time of this writing he still refuses to identify all of the faked passages in his movie.

The danger posed by deepfakes should be obvious and is already here. Rana Ayyub is a female investigative jour-

nalist in India famous for exposing government corruption and human rights abuses. Three years ago, still-unidentified political enemies posted to WhatsApp a fake porn clip with Ayyub's face on the body of the woman in the video. Instantly, the video was everywhere on social media networks. Death threats aimed at Ayyub ensued. Her home address was publicized, and she went into hiding for months.

It may seem like a big leap from a documentarian's faked voiceover to the character assassination (and worse) of a public figure, but that's only if you are entirely naïve about the course the tech industry has taken in the past 25 years. That is a story of digital technology consistently outrunning our capacity to manage it and leaving chaos and disaster in its wake. When Mark Zuckerberg and his friends were creating Facebook in a Harvard dorm room, they weren't thinking about live-streaming rape and mass murder, but that's what the platform they created ended up with. Anonymity on Twitter helped fuel democratic uprisings around the Middle East, but it also shielded the people who attacked Rana Ayyub.

We can't uninvent deepfake technology, but our federal government has to impose tight regulation on its proliferation—before our post-truth world goes post-reality. ♦

Danny Duncan Collum, author of the novel *White Boy*, teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort.



**COMPLICATED CHARACTERS
CARE FOR ONE ANOTHER WHILE
WRESTLING WITH THE PAIN
THEY PERPETUATE.**

father's prayers and sermons, carefully studying his process. She particularly envies her younger brother Caleb, who has the privilege of shadowing their father. Still, she prays that the scandal of the previous summer—when her father injured a pregnant girl he was meant to heal—does not follow them into the new season.

Everything changes when Miriam witnesses her father's violence firsthand. Then, as her world unravels, Miriam discovers that she has the spiritual gift that has eluded her father, a gift that is a "sin" in a woman's hands but a "blessing" in a man's. As Samuel's pride drives away his followers and his household tiptoes around the minefield of his rage, Miriam reflects on how her own faith in God once felt inextricable from her faith in her father: "He never said it outright—*Believe in me as you believe in God*—that would have been obvious blasphemy and idolatry. But he was the all-consuming presence that filled my entire life, taking up all the space in the house and in revival tents. In its absence was a black hole that seemed bigger than the presence that had inhabited it."

Throughout her brilliant debut novel, West handles her protagonist's growing awareness with grace and empathy. As Miriam's eyes open to the realities around her, she must unlearn the problematic ideologies she's inherited, especially when it comes to her mother's mental illness and her sister's disability. And despite the stifling world they live in, the women (and girls) of *Revival Season* are complicated and fully realized characters who care for one another while wrestling with the pain they subconsciously perpetuate. In this way, *Revival Season* is a necessary coming-of-age story that is as much about the mysteries of faith and family as it is about the complexities of forgiveness and resilience. ✦

Elinam Agbo earned an M.F.A. from the University of Michigan Helen Zell Writers' Program. Born in Ghana, she grew up in the U.S. Midwest.

MYSTERIES OF FAITH AND FAMILY

Revival Season,
by Monica West

Simon & Schuster

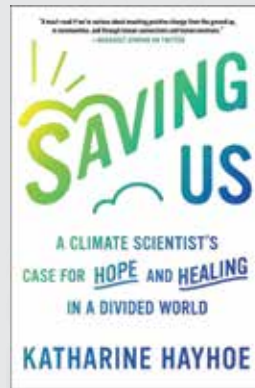
For 12 years, the Hortons have spent their summers on the revival circuit, driving hundreds of miles from one small city to another. Samuel Horton, a Black Baptist preacher famous for his healing, is proud of the souls he has won for the Lord and prouder of the power he wields. Still, he yearns for miracles no one would question, that would wipe away any doubt in his ability. If only he could heal his younger daughter, Hannah, who has cerebral palsy. If only his wife could give him another son, especially after their second son, Isaiah, was stillborn. In his pride, Samuel blames the women around him for his own limitations, even as he relies on them to hold together the picture of faith he has carefully constructed.

Behind the scenes of Samuel's performance is 15-year-old Miriam Horton, the narrator of Monica West's *Revival Season*. When the novel opens, Miriam is in awe of her father's position and power, despite questioning the limited roles women hold in her community. As she helps raise Hannah and supports her mother, she memorizes her

IDENTITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Saving Us: A Climate Scientist's
Case for Hope and Healing
in a Divided World,
by Katharine Hayhoe

Atria/One Signal Publishers



A

Among the many postures toward climate change, I am in the “alarmed” camp. I see indicators of a planet on the verge of widespread ecosystem collapse and want to sound the bells for everyone else to wake up and do something. Unfortunately, writes climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe, some of the ways we try to

wake people up can have the opposite effect.

Saving Us expands on Hayhoe’s popular TED Talk on the most important thing you can do about climate change: talk about it. The book explores why piling on sobering facts and predictions can make someone dismissive about climate change even *more* antagonistic, and even make those who are concerned and alarmed check out in despair. Though Hayhoe includes plenty of climate science, what makes this book worth reading are the insights she shares from social science.

People do nothing about climate change, Hayhoe writes, not because they necessarily reject the science, but because admitting there is a problem may threaten their sense of identity (*I’m a good person, not ruining the planet*). Or we may perceive there is nothing significant we can do, or that we stand to lose more from the solutions—no more steak dinners or family road trips—than to gain.

By framing resistance to climate solutions in social and psychological terms, Hayhoe paves the way to more productive conversations. She helps us see the “other side” not as enemies, but fellow humans. Having read *Saving Us*, I better understand my own human responses. I, too, want to be a good person and do the right thing. But I can end up raising others’ defenses by using shame, guilt, and a sense of my own moral superiority to prompt their action.

Sustained climate action will not be motivated by fear or guilt, but by love, Hayhoe writes, in an echo of the apostle Paul’s words (2 Timothy 1:7). We want to save the things we love. To activate others, we can connect

**SUSTAINED CLIMATE ACTION
WILL NOT BE MOTIVATED BY FEAR
OR GUILT, BUT BY LOVE.**

on what they already care about—winter sports, the town water supply, children, or faith. We can invite people into a better future in ways that enhance, rather than challenge, their identities.

I would have liked for Hayhoe to expand on her last chapter on hope and courage. She is clear that it’s not too late to act to avoid some of the most dangerous impacts of climate change. Hope, she writes, is not “God is in control” fatalism, but rather it is practiced through courageous action. Still, I wonder, where *is* God in this? How does one pray? How does one grieve constant ecological loss?

These may be questions for another book, as Hayhoe’s aim here is to address a general audience with practical strategies for bridge-building conversations. If we can put Hayhoe’s advice into action, we will certainly be on our way to a more hopeful future. ❧

Luan Huska is author of *Hurting Yet Whole: Reconciling Body and Spirit in Chronic Pain and Illness*.



cont'd from page 40 is achieved: Black people are supposed to advocate for themselves, make the most of the junk given to them, and save the world.

The show's diverse characters rarely have experiences realistic to the United States in the '70s and '80s. One is skeptical—given the treatment so far—that the HIV/AIDS crisis will be a significant plot point for the gay characters in season three even though it's set in 1995, a year in which an estimated 50,000 people with AIDS died in the U.S.

The question is not whether *For All Mankind* is willing to portray history correctly in a surgical sense, but whether it is willing to portray it accurately, or if it wants to feed the broader myth of space travel. *For All Mankind* is not yet great fiction, though it has the potential.

Exploring space travel through fiction provides immense possibilities for reflection for those of us bound to terra firma, as proven by Afrofuturistic works and even pop culture like *Star Trek*. Great fictions can teach us about reality, asking us to consider and correct our course as we aim to become like—or unlike—the future their authors portray.

To make seasons three through seven better than the first two, *For All Mankind's* writers will have to seriously grapple with the sins of the United States, racial capitalism, and colonialism. It will have to reverse course on the myth that an expanse to lunar and celestial bodies will solve the climate crisis, inspire peace, or create an inclusive country.

Otherwise, the show will simply peddle the myth that Bezos, Branson, and our capitalist overlords are attempting to sell. ❖

Mitchell Atencio is assistant news editor, sojo.net.

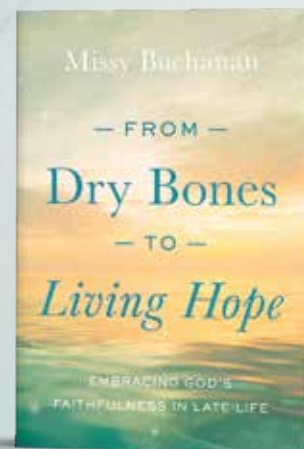
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I AM THE HARVEST

By Luke Sawczak



I will teach you by the river,
I will name the place to meet,
how quick is the water;
I am the harvest: come gather and eat!

This is no time for spectators,
no time to take a weary seat;
pray for more workers;
I am the harvest: come gather and eat!

The mountains sigh across the field
and what they say the dells repeat,
the earth's a living being;
I am the harvest: come gather and eat!

Every crow that watches is an angel,
the dove atop the post the paraclete,
you work awash in grace;
I am the harvest: come gather and eat!

Each grain and bud I ask you fully love,
each drop of water and each ounce of meat,
only chaff must be let fall;
I am the harvest: come gather and eat!

Wake late into the night that you may listen,
bring oil and answer when the rains entreat,
there is light you barely see;
I am the harvest: come gather and eat!

Life in the form of food abounds forever,
the green the ground pulls over as a sheet,
eternity of life awaits;
I am the harvest: come gather and eat!

Luke Sawczak teaches at Toronto District Christian High School in Woodbridge, Ontario.

IS IT POSSIBLE TO HOLD ON TO CHRISTIAN FAITH IN AN AGE OF UNBELIEF? YES!



Brian Zahnd Tackles Deconstruction

"Brian Zahnd's unique voice is neither 'liberal' nor 'conservative.' It is both cheekily irreverent and profoundly faithful. Above all, it is Christ-centered. . . . I just wish the church would listen to him more. Here's your chance!"

—FLEMING RUTLEDGE,
author of *The Crucifixion* and *Advent*



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GOD WAITS INSIDE A HUMAN LIFE

Scripture passages are
from the Revised Common
Lectionary, Cycle B and C

By Isaac S. Villegas



Living the Word

The Bible is about scrappy people. We read about communities that pass along wisdom, from one generation to the next, on how to survive (despite the violence that threatens their existence)

and on faith in God, which keeps their hope alive. We worship the God of Exodus who leads people out of oppression. I believe in God's ongoing work of liberation. However, the Exodus shouldn't be the only lens through which we discern God's action in our world. When the version of liberation found in Exodus becomes our central frame to recognize the characteristics of God's presence, we occlude from our vision the Spirit's prosaic and laborious provisions of survival.

In her landmark *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, theologian Delores S. Williams turns our attention to the witness of Black women who create communities of survival. She writes about the "art of care" and the "art of connection" as survival strategies of Black women. Her guide is Hagar, a biblical character who struggles to piece together life in the wilderness after Abram and Sarai—with God's sanction—banish her from their household. "We can speak of Hagar and many African American women as sisters in the wilderness struggling for life," Williams explains, "and by the help of their God coming to terms with situations that have destructive potential."

Our scriptures this month don't imagine spectacular visions of liberation. Instead, they invite us to live out our hope *within* the wilderness—with Williams and Hagar—as we become people of refuge. We pass along God's grace in our arts of survival and mutual care.

Isaac S. Villegas is pastor of Chapel Hill (N.C.) Mennonite Fellowship and president of the governing board of the North Carolina Council of Churches.

THE WIDOW BECOMES THE PROVIDER, THE ONE WHO MEDIATES THE HOSPITALITY OF GOD.

NOVEMBER 7

NEED AS GIFT

1 KINGS 17:8-16; PSALM 146;
HEBREWS 9:24-28; MARK 12:38-44

The plotline of the book of 1 Kings tells story after story about the exploits of kings. In chapter 17, however, with Israel in disarray under King Ahab's reign of terror, the narrator abruptly turns our attention from the heights of royal power to the plight of the lowly. "Go now to Zarephath," God says to the prophet Elijah, "for I have commanded a widow to feed you" (verse 9).

God leads Elijah to live among peasants. While Elijah's world falls apart, his home country in disorder, God sends him to a widow in a foreign land. The prophet's mission is to ask the poorest of the poor for food and drink. "I have nothing," she says upon Elijah's arrival, only "a handful of meal ... and a little oil" (verse 12). Elijah presents his neediness to a needy woman, his dependency to someone with nearly nothing left to give.

In his book *Rethinking Generosity*, political theorist Romand Coles explores the dynamics of giving and receiving, how the powerful enact their dominance through benevolence: as patron, host, philanthropist; always the giver, never a recipient. "When generosity becomes separated from receptivity," Coles writes, "it tends toward imperialism." Without genuine relationship, charitable acts may establish a person more within the social class of the generous, people without needs. Coles quotes German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche: "The heart and hand of those who always mete out become callous from always meting out." The generous become hardened, protected from receiving from others, shielded from a recognition of dependency.

To heal the givers from callousness, Coles points toward the "mutual transfigurations" that happen when we recognize the gifts of others, that all of us are held in a social web of provisions and dependencies—a gift of life shared in our receiving

and giving. In 1 Kings 17, Elijah learns how to receive. The widow becomes the provider, the benefactor, the one who mediates the hospitality of God.

NOVEMBER 14

REFUGES OF CARE

DANIEL 12:1-3; PSALM 16;
HEBREWS 10:11-25; MARK 13:1-8

"Do you see these great buildings?" Jesus points to the temple in Jerusalem, a holy place central to his faith. "Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down" (Mark 13:2). Jesus is a political realist. He has discerned the signs of the times. He sees the portents of a catastrophe. Rebellion against Roman occupation was simmering; Jesus knows the pot will soon boil over. As the temple falls, the world begins a slow collapse: "earthquakes and famines, tremors like birth pangs," Jesus foretells, and "nation will rise against nation" (verse 8).

As Trump's presidency unleashed ethno-nationalistic terrors, I listened to Paul Cooper's *Fall of Civilizations* podcast. Each episode tells the story of a historic civilization in collapse: the Han dynasty of ancient China, the thousand-year dominion of Byzantium, the Khmer Empire of medieval Cambodia, the Incas of the Andes, and others. Cooper captures the moments when a people realized that this is the end of their society—the staggering experience of the beginning of the end. The stories were a strange comfort to me as Trump's federal policies ravaged our local communities—to know that I wasn't alone, that we weren't alone. History has been a long chain of catastrophes. Remnants of social life appear after the end.

You and I have arrived on the scene in the wake of disasters. Our lives are built on the wreckage of the past. "This is but the beginning of the birth pangs," Jesus warns his friends (verse 8). Violence recycles through history. The psalmist gives us guidance for use in every generation: "Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge ... my body rests secure" (Psalm 16:1, 9). In our tumultuous times, we extend God's refuge to each other, the church as a community where our bodies rest secure in God. Birth pangs signal our time to become homemakers, ready to welcome life into refuges of care.

NOVEMBER 21

WE ARE PONTIUS PILATE

DANIEL 7:9-10, 13-14; PSALM 93;
REVELATION 1:4-8; JOHN 18:33-37

This passage from John's gospel recounts the interrogation of Jesus by Pontius Pilate, governor of Roman Judea—a judicial review that leads to Jesus' condemnation and death. The Apostles' Creed remembers Pilate as the enemy par excellence of Jesus: He "suffered under Pontius Pilate." Jesus Christ is a victim of Pilate's violence. The creed does not let us forget that the crucifixion happens at Pilate's command. His name is named; blame is assigned.

I have a list of people who I would name as enemies, and some who would recognize me as their enemy: for example, the police who arrested me and other community members when we blocked U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents from deporting a friend. An ICE field office director identified us as enemies and had us jailed so he could conduct the violence of a state-sponsored kidnapping. I'd like to think of the ICE agent as in similar position to Pilate, and my deported friend as his victim—and, due to our community defense efforts, myself counted among the collateral victims, all of us becoming enemies of ICE.

All that is true. And I know that biblical narratives twist and turn on us. One moment we think we're the kind of people whose justice work puts us in solidarity with Jesus; the next moment we see ourselves in the disciples who betray him. John 18 prods us to consider how we're like Pilate—a passage to expose the Pilate inside each of us.

"In slaying him," Ralph C. Wood expounds on the creed, "Pontius Pilate serves as our representative." Pilate doesn't personally nail Jesus to the cross, yet he's named as the one responsible for the crucifixion. I haven't committed gruesome violence, yet my U.S. citizenship marks me as a beneficiary of the military's terrors abroad. I'd prefer to consider myself as an

**JESUS IS A POLITICAL REALIST.
HE HAS DISCERNED THE SIGNS
OF THE TIMES.**

enemy to colonialism rather than a member of a settler colony. So, I wash my hands.

As for Pilate: The Ethiopian Orthodox Church believes that Pilate and his wife, Claudia Procula, became believers in The Way after the resurrection appearances and later were martyred for their faith.

NOVEMBER 28

ADVENT WAITING

JEREMIAH 33:14-16; PSALM 25:1-10;
1 THESSALONIANS 3:9-13; LUKE 21:25-36

Advent is a season of waiting: four weeks to remember the anticipation of that first Christmas, the expectation of the birth of Jesus. To wait on God—that's the heart of our faith. We are people who live in expectation of God's advent in our lives and in the world.

The Bible, from the first page to the last, reads like a book about waiting—for the promised land, for the end of exile, for the Messiah, and, in the concluding chapter, in the book of Revelation, waiting for the day of judgment and Christ's return. "Come, Lord Jesus" we read in the final verses of the Bible (Revelation 22:20). The end of the book is about waiting, about calling out to Jesus to come back, to save us from what we've done to God's world.

To wait for salvation is a consistent theme in the Psalter, the heart of the Bible. "You are the God of my salvation," the psalmist prays, "for you I wait all day long" (Psalm 25:5). In these verses of our psalm, we hear the ache of hope, the psalmist calling out for God to take notice of our human condition, our plight. "Be mindful of your mercy ... remember your steadfast love" (25:6). The psalmist longs for salvation, for God's mercy and love.

During Advent we discover that the wait is bearable, the longing tolerable, the ache sufferable, because God waits with us. The promise revealed in Advent is that God submits to Mary, that God trusts Mary, that God waits inside a human life. And if God waited with Mary, then we trust that God now waits with us, the gospel inside of us, the promise of God's life within ours. ✱

"Preaching the Word," Sojourners' online resource for Bible study and sermon preparation, is available at sojo.net/ptw.

H'rumps



**I'M PRETTY SURE
MR. THE RAPPER
NEVER PLAYED THE
HOLIDAY INN EXPRESS.**

much as clapped their hands during the annual children's ministry Christmas Eve musical celebration. Now they suddenly thought they were Chance the Rapper in concert (although I'm pretty sure Mr. the Rapper never played the Holiday Inn Express). Everyone in the room seemed to meld into one communal, carousing cluster of joy; the carousing, admittedly, was on G-rated side and the only drinking involved grape juice. People were having so much fun that, when the fellowship staff worker said it was time for bed, everyone refused to leave the dance floor—that is, until the DJ played “Sweet Home Alabama,” which caused such a rush off the floor and toward the elevators that I was afraid the elevators would drop at a speed paralleling the Tower of Terror.

While it's easy to say I want to dance, for this church boy grown up, acting on it is more challenging. If, say, I were to appear before a Senate confirmation hearing (could happen), and before they confirmed my appointment as Deputy Secretary of Transportation (less likely since I don't own a scooter) they told me that my final task was to do a dance (okay, that's probably not going to happen), I would say, “I'm sorry, Senator, but I'm afraid Secretary Buttigieg will just have to find another dance partner—maybe try someone from the Episcopal Church.”

Despite my hesitations around tripping the light fandango (which I hope means “dancing”), I want to give it a try. After all, the psalmist tells us that dance is a form of praise and says that “You turned my wailing into dancing” (other, nonstandard translations render that verse “You turned my flailing into dancing,” which is another thing altogether). Bottom line is, go ahead and channel your inner Whitney. I'm pretty sure you won't regret it. ✦

Joey Chin, a former *Sojourners* fellow, is an elementary school teacher in Redmond, Wash.

DANCE DANCE DANCE

By Joey Chin

Every once in a while, while brushing my teeth or driving to work, my mind will wander to what I call “future regrets”—things that I'm pretty sure I'll rue later in life but about which I do nothing to resolve in the present. Those include obvious ones like not flossing or watching PBS *NewsHour* enough. But there's one thing in that category that's a little more unexpected: dancing.

The sheer act of dancing—with its flailing of the arms and stomping of the feet (including, inevitably, stomping on other people's feet)—doesn't exactly lend itself to those inclined toward modesty and reserve. And unless you're doing that flailing and stomping while walking over hot coals at the direction of human resources as part of your new employee training icebreaker, people will probably turn their attention to you, and not in a good way. But for those of us who grew up in churches where dancing was frowned upon, stepping out on the dance floor feels like a theological risk as well. (Old joke: “Why do Baptists prohibit sex while standing up? It might lead to dancing.”)

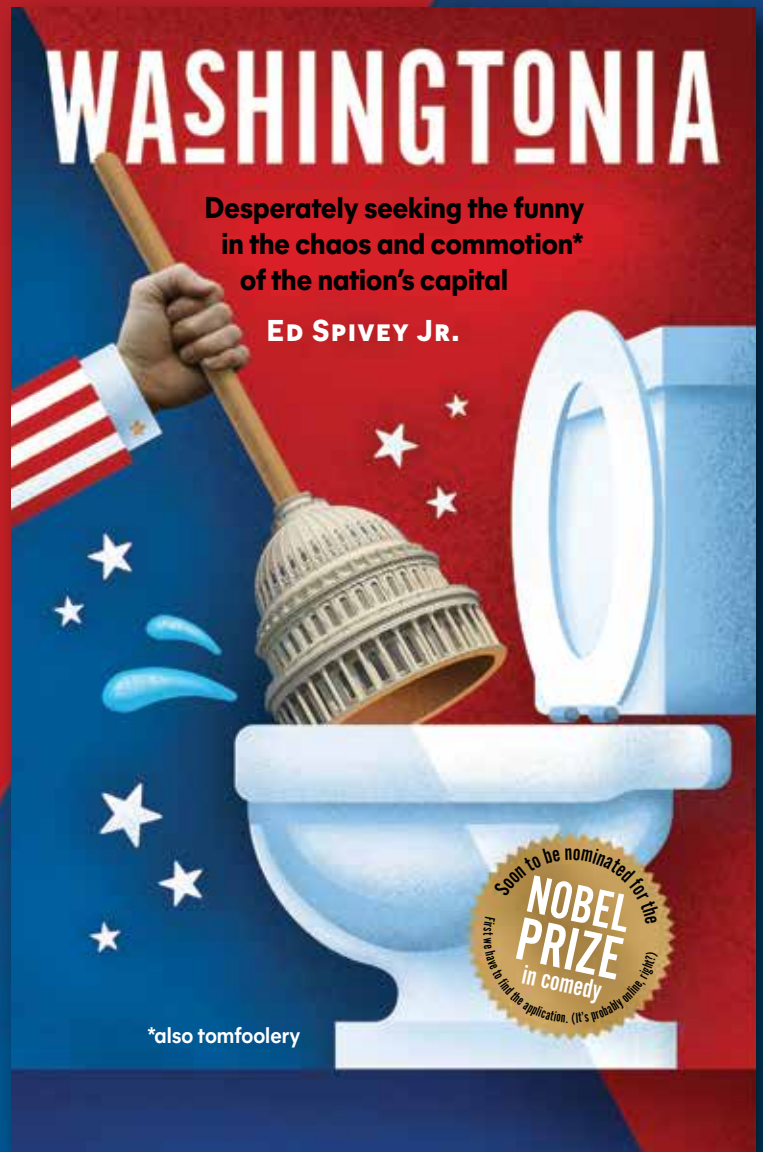
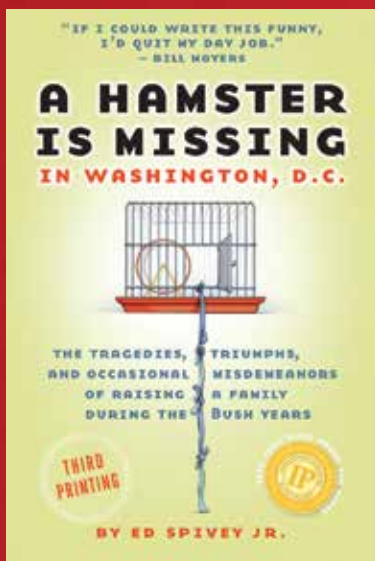
In my junior year of college, I attended a three-day Christian conference that culminated in an epic dance party (lasting exactly 11 songs—41 minutes). For the first three songs, people stood and looked at each other, just as I did for 96 percent of the one high school dance I went to. But then they put on Miley Cyrus' “Party in the U.S.A.,” and we did. Party, that is. Well, at least we began to move our feet a little, which given the setting was pretty remarkable: These were people who had probably never so

THIS CHRISTMAS, GIVE THE GIFT OF LAUGHTER (IT'S CHEAPER.)

You remember Ed Spivey Jr., right? Sure you do. He was the award-winning humorist for *Sojourners* until he retired to spend more time with Netflix (sorry, his family). His second book of columns, *Washingtonia*, has just been published and looks back on life in our nation's capital since 2010. And who wouldn't want to relive those years? Okay, don't answer that. But he found the funny hidden in them, although it wasn't easy. (And as we all know, people who refuse to learn the lessons of history will have to repeat that class, and it will probably be early in the morning and way across campus.) His latest work is a follow-up on his first book, also award-winning, which is now in its third printing.

Both books are available and suitable for reading or gift-giving. Or you can read them first *then* gift them, if you're that kind of person.

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I NEVER THOUGHT I WOULD FEEL ANYTHING BUT ANGER

I was raised in a rural village in the Department of Chiquimula in Guatemala. My father raised coffee and my mother taught school. It was a wonderful time for me. But one day, when I was ten, a group of soldiers came to my house. They beat and tortured my father in front of my family. They took my father away and we never saw him again.

From Despair to Hope

My response to this traumatic loss was deep bitterness and anger, sometimes expressed violently until, after many years, I turned to the God my mother always called me to and laid my anger down. God provided two communities, one Quaker and one Mennonite, that surrounded me with love and I began the process of healing, eventually understanding and embracing the nonviolent way of Jesus and the Biblical story of justice, reconciliation and peace – the Reign of God.

Service in Guatemala

For me it is very special to serve in Guatemala City as the leader of SEMILLA Latin American Anabaptist Seminary, an institution founded, owned and led by Central Americans who, at the height of 20th century violence, discovered and embraced for themselves Anabaptist theology, the nonviolent way of Jesus in the midst of poverty, oppression and violence. I find continued healing and blessing

as part of a community of educators that provides practical and empowering Biblical and theological education, with a focus on nonviolent transformation, for as many as 800 adult students each year, leaders and servants in impoverished communities throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.

Join the Cause

I invite you to learn more about SEMILLA at our website, SEMILLAGT.ORG, and especially our CASAS (Central American Study and Service) program that provides Spanish language study (online or in person), cultural immersion and service opportunities, from a peace church perspective, for North American university and seminary students.

For more information on short and long-term educational opportunities, including learning tours and sabbatical opportunities for pastors and educators, email us at DIRECCIONCASAS@SEMILLAGT.ORG.

God bless you and lead you in the paths of peace.